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HONEST
DAVIE

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by the Queen.



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HONEST DAVIE.

A Novel.

BY

FRANK BARRETT,

AUTHOR OF

'LIEUTENANT BARNABAS,' 'A PRODIGAL'S PROGRESS,' ETC.

•IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON :

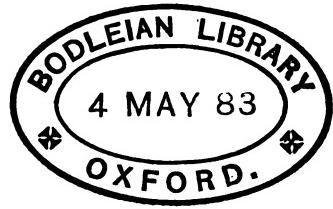
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HONEST DAVIE.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH MR. ADAMS RECEIVES LORD AND
LADY KESTRAL.

MHEN Mr. Adams protested that there was nought amiss with him, and that he never felt better in his life, Miss Adams believed him, for her spirits were just as volatile that evening as his were heavy; and then, turning to me, thanked me in a very graceful little speech for a bouquet I had bought in Covent Garden, and sent to her in the afternoon.

‘I put them in the green-house to keep fresh. Will you come with me to get them?’ she asked.

I accepted the proposal, and Mr. Adams, feigning to have some business with his butler, went with leaden paces out of the room by one door, while his daughter, with feet as light as her heart, tripped out by the other, her hand under my arm.

‘Do you know any of the new dances?’ she asked, as we entered the long dancing-room.

‘No, indeed,’ said I, smiling to think that I had never stepped a measure in my life.

‘You don’t think dancing very—very childish and silly, do you?’

This she asked with a sudden change from gaiety to gravity.

‘Suppose that I do; what then?’

‘I should be very sorry.’

‘Sorry for my want of taste?’ She

shook her head. ‘Would it spoil your pleasure in dancing to think that I saw nothing in it to admire?’

‘I would never dance another step,’ she cried quickly, ‘if I thought you despised it.’

‘Why?’

‘Why?’ she echoed, turning upon me with a little look of indignation. ‘Do you think I would do anything that I knew to be despisable?’

‘How could you know that a thing was despisable which a hundred praised and only one condemned?’

‘Because—if the one was papa, for instance,’ she said, with a little confusion, ‘I should be sure his opinion was just, and worth all the rest put together.’

‘But your papa does not despise dancing.’

‘Do you?’ she asked, with a frown and a blush, impatient of an argument that was betraying her feelings.

‘Not at all. The only regret I shall have in seeing you dance will be that I am not your partner.’

‘Cannot you dance? You look as if you could.’

‘I don’t know the difference between a gavotte and a minuet.’

‘Shall I teach you?’ she asked, stopping short, and looking at me with bright expectancy.

‘I should like nothing better.’

‘Oh, famous! The musicians haven’t come yet, but we’ll find Miss Dobson, and make her play for us. Come along! No one will be here for nearly an hour yet. What fun! What kind of dance would you like to learn?’

‘Whichever you like to teach me.’

‘Pillow dances are countrified and stupid, rigadoons are old-fashioned, contra dances are nice; but I think a minuet—don’t you—’

She stopped suddenly. We were in the green-house, through which she had been hurrying me along to find Miss Dobson, who was in the tea-room. ‘There is my bouquet,’ said she, showing me the flowers I had sent her, which were set in moist moss.

They looked poor enough amidst the brighter and finer blooms with which the house was filled; but happily she did not see them with my eyes. She was no longer garrulous; she hung over the bouquet in silence, as if she had not already thanked me for it, and were trying to find some suitable words. She looked from it to me, from me to it, and then, whipping off her glove, gave me her hand, and smiled as I pressed my lips upon it.

Miss Dobson was easily prevailed upon to quit her post in the tea-room—which was arranged for the refreshment of seemingly

very hungry and thirsty guests, for the tables and sideboards were crowded with dishes of confectionery and decanters of wine—and returned with us to the dancing-room, where she seated herself before the pianoforte, and played while Miss Adams instructed me in the first steps of the minuet.

And sure there was never painted a prettier picture than that young and sprightly girl presented, as she lifted the hem of her skirts to show me how the steps were to be made. It is no wonder that I made but clumsy movements with my own feet as I looked at hers. She knew how charming and how beautiful she was, and every now and again she would glance sidelong at the mirror on the wall for the pleasure of seeing herself. This pardonable pride gave her an air of exultation not inappropriate to the majestic movements of the minuet.

A queen might have stepped as nobly and as gracefully as she, but not more so.

There may be something in the music and movements of this dance that excites the imagination with lofty ideas. I admit that after I had been put through my paces, and could make the grand volt without mistake, I was prodigiously inflated with a sense of my own consequence as I led my partner into the middle of the room ; and spying myself in the glass, was particularly well pleased with the figure I cut, with my manner of raising my partner's hand, with the fall in my back, and my elegant gait, though doubtless I strutted like a game-cock, and was ridiculous enough to more impartial eyes.

About nine o'clock visitors were announced ; with that the dancing lesson came to an abrupt conclusion, and I became only a unit in the rapidly gathering throng of Miss Adams's admirers ; although she did

her utmost to distinguish me from them by signal marks of preference, and was clearly disappointed that I took such slight pains to profit by my advantage. I think she had looked forward to some little triumph through me, and expected me to astonish everyone by my wit and wisdom ; but my jealousy made me remarkable only for my dulness and want of amiability. I was disposed to acknowledge no single good quality in any one of her friends, and least of all in those who were most agreeable to her ; and my silence did not help to conceal my contempt for them. Indeed, I never felt more intolerant in my life ; and I verily believe that had the Admirable Crichton been amongst the number of her suitors, I could have found some damnable element in his character.

When Miss Adams found that I would make myself neither pleasant nor amusing, she very properly testified her resentment

by turning her shoulder upon me, and made no effort to retain me as I withdrew from the circle of young bloods about her.

The rooms were filling rapidly, and, as it seemed to me, with just such people as had been described by my uncle. I had not been in society for twelve or fourteen years, but I perceived clearly that either the habits of gentlefolks had altered considerably for the worse, or that Mr. Adams's visitors were not gentlefolks at all. They lacked the unstudied ease of people who are never careless, and that perfect self-command which is, I take it, the distinguishing characteristic of a gentleman. And just as a clumsy copyist seizes upon a too prominent feature, and exaggerates it in his portrait, neglecting altogether the fine lines that beautify the original and tone down its defects, so these people, to present a recognisable likeness, caricatured gentility by

overacting the least agreeable of its attributes. They were servile when they meant only to be civil, and were impudent when they would be thought easy. They bowed too low, they held their heads too high ; they snuffed too often ; they laughed too loud ; either they sat like graven images, or they sprawled like Turks ; they shifted their hands from one part of their person to another, unable to decide which position was most elegant, or they thrust them in their breeches-pockets, and kept them there ; and while one walked about with his shoe-string hanging, because he conceived it beneath his dignity to tie it, another made no hesitation in slipping his wig up to scratch his head.

The ladies were not more remarkable for their elegant behaviour than for their youth and beauty. Some six or eight had been brought in by their husbands, their fathers,

or their sons; and, being quickly deserted by them, had congregated in a corner of the room, whence they could regard the group of which Miss Adams was the centre. They tittered and giggled a great deal, and when they had anything to say spoke behind their fans; when they were neither tittering nor talking they looked supremely contemptuous and unhappy.

‘What, Mr. Falkland, all alone, sir?’ said a voice near me.

I turned, and found Mr. Adams at my side. ‘Come, sir, I fear you are not enjoying yourself. Shall I introduce you to Captain Hasher or the Honourable Mr. Sparks?’

‘Thank you,’ said I, ‘Miss Adams has already introduced me to them.’

‘And you don’t care for ’em, hey, sir?’ he asked, in an undertone.

‘I see very little to admire in them.’

‘I am glad, for one reason, to hear you say

so. I was afraid I had taken an unjust prejudice against 'em. I am about to drink a glass of wine, sir; will you do me the honour to join me?

I accepted his proposal, and we walked towards the tea-room.

'I don't feel quite the thing to-night,' he said—'a little shaky and nervous; and I think a glass of wine will set me up. Do you know at what time we may look to see your aunt and uncle, sir?'

'About this time,' said I, looking at my watch.

He wiped his forehead as he repeated my words. 'I don't feel at all right to-night,' he added with emphasis. 'Gene'lly I stay in the hall till all my friends have come—seems to me the civil thing to do, you know, sir; but to-night I couldn't stay there—got confused. Still, I should like to be at the door when your aunt and uncle arrive.'

‘I see no reason for treating them differently to your other guests.’

‘To be sure, that would be best; thank you, sir, for the hint; meet them just as if they were nobody in particular. Hark! there’s something drawing up at the door now.’

We were in the tea-room; a sound of wheels reached us; and as we listened, we heard the opening and shutting of a carriage door.

‘Them, I warrant,’ said he. ‘Mr. Falkland, would you mind coming into the hall with me—accidentally like? It will kind of explain anything different in my manner if it is your aunt and uncle.’

I acceded without hesitation, only wondering what the cause of his embarrassment could be—what possible connection existed between Lady Kestral and him. We passed from the tea-room into the hall

at the very moment Lord Kestral and his wife entered it by the door from the front.

‘How do you do, Squire—how do you do?’ cried Mr. Adams, taking his lordship by the hand; ‘and how do you do, ma’am? —glad to see you!’ He dropped my uncle’s hand, and offered his own to my aunt as he spoke.

She kept her hands by her side, and made a low courtesy, with no movement in her face except the slightest perceptible downward curving of the lips in contempt. Lord Kestral looked from Mr. Adams to his wife, from her to him, and back again, during this exchange of courtesies; and then he threw a quick glance of suspicion at me. He was perplexed and disappointed, as I know now.

‘Hope you’ll make yourself at home ma’am,’ continued Mr. Adams, dropping his hand, when he found it was not to be

shaken, with the unconcern of one who is not unused to being rebuffed in friendly approaches. ‘Mr. Falkland told me that his uncle would do me the honour to bring you with him.’

‘Mr. Falkland’s uncle,’ said Lady Kestral, with malicious emphasis, ‘can doubtless tell you better than I why he has given himself such pains to bring us acquainted, Mr. Adams.’

With that she took my arm, and we passed through to the drawing-room, leaving his lordship to follow with Mr. Adams, to whom he had as yet not addressed a single word.

She pressed my arm, and murmured, ‘Thank you!’ and when we were well out of hearing :

‘You know all now?’ she said.

‘I know nothing,’ said I.

‘I thought, from your being with

him when we met, that he had told you.'

'He would have told me had he wished me to know.'

'And you are content to know nothing?'

'Quite.'

'That proves that you are not Lord Kestral's partisan.'

'I have no extraordinary liking for my uncle.'

'Then let us keep away as far as possible from the horrible old man. I hate him; and if you know anything of my history, even as he would tell it, you will see that I have good reason for my hatred. Let us get away from him in thought even. That is Miss Adams over there, in the midst of the crowd? Don't take me that way just now—presently. Mr. Adams is walking towards her with my husband.' (It was marvellous how much Lady Kestral took in

Mr. Adams Receives Lady Kestral. 17

with one long sweeping glance.) ‘What gorgeous appointments ! Is it the fashion now to furnish rooms in this mode ?’

‘ I know as little of the fashions as you. I believe Miss Adams consulted no taste but her own : she is an artist.’

‘ An artist ! I should not have thought it from the glimpse I caught of her face. Mr. Adams allows her to indulge her fancies ?’

‘ Entirely. He yields to her wishes in everything.’

Lady Kestral sighed. Her eyes slowly wandered over the groups of people before her.

‘ What horrid women ! Let us pass close by them ; my dress seems to amuse the poor souls. I pity them ; they are infinitely better than the men, of whom I know the look well enough ; they infest the theatre. You know that I was for some years on the stage ?’

‘Lord Kestral told me so.’

‘”Tis a school where one learns character better than elsewhere. One meets men of all sorts there, and gets a knack of distinguishing at first sight the real gentleman from the false. I have not seen one man of good condition here ; they are adventurers, bubbles, cheats, like my husband, with even less than he has to support their pretensions ; men who live by appearances ; empty-headed, empty-handed, empty-hearted impostors, who will beg or borrow, or cheat or bully, or do anything that is mean rather than work. Has Miss Adams chosen her friends as she has furnished her house, by consulting only her own taste ?’

I replied with some hot and hasty words
—I know not what.

‘Don’t be angry with me,’ said she. ‘I spoke spitefully, because my thoughts were dwelling on Miss Adams’s guests rather

than upon her. I have no feeling except of goodwill towards Mr. Adams and his daughter, and I wish you to like me ; that,' she added slyly, 'is a second reason for showing no disrespect to Miss Adams, I think. It does not annoy you to find that the company here displeases me ?'

'Not at all ; it displeases me equally, I assure you.'

'Does it not surprise you to find this kind of people here ?'

'Not at all ; we are all blinded by flattery, and Miss Adams has not—has not—'

'Has not my experience, you would say. That is true, happily for her ; though I doubt if, even with my experience, she would be proof against flattery. The wisest and the worst of men and women are never too old to be cheated by that. I was not thinking of Miss Adams, but of

her father, who should know what sort of people he admits into his house. They don't seem to flatter him greatly. Look at the group near the door, there ; I saw the men deliberately turn their backs upon him as he approached to introduce my husband, and now they have learnt his title you see what has happened !'

The group surrounded Lord Kestral, and Mr. Adams, edged out of the circle, stood waiting patiently for his lordship to be released from his admirers.

'Mr. Adams has lived in seclusion,' I explained, 'and he naturally believes these men to be what they pretend they are.'

'I am surprised he has not discovered the contrary, all the same ; for these people have not even the good sense of a pack of wolves, who, I believe, do combine together for mutual support—they are so envious one of another that, as if the truth were not bad

enough to tell, they invent lies to the discredit of their acquaintances, and try to make some sort of reputation for themselves by attempting to destroy the reputation of others. I fancy my husband will not be remiss in this respect when he has left the group and rejoined Mr. Adams ; they have gone through that door together. I would wager my gloves he is slandering the men who just now held him by the hand. Here comes Miss Adams towards us. She dresses boldly, but she carries her dress well. Very graceful figure, and a charming manner. She looks particularly amiable ; but that may be because she is a little jealous of your attentions to me. I have seen her eyes upon us. Introduce me.'

I introduced my aunt to Miss Adams. We were close by the group of women ; they ceased tittering to catch the name, and I was vastly amused by the sudden change

in their expression as they heard my aunt's title pronounced, and turned to each other in astonishment.

Miss Adams was not content with a courtesy ; she held out her hand to Lady Kestral, with a few warm words of welcome ; to which my aunt, as if animated by a mutual feeling of affection, responded with equal ardour, as she held the young lady's hand and scanned her candid, lovely countenance.

When they had exchanged a few compliments, Miss Adams proposed that we should go into the adjoining room, where Signor Berboni—Mr. Adams called him Signor Barebone, which was a not un-applicable name for the meagre tenor—was about to sing. This proposal my aunt readily acceded to. The two ladies took my arms, and I was leading them off, when a diversion was caused by the servant at the

other end of the room throwing open the door and crying out, ‘Dr. Blandly.’

My aunt stopped suddenly at the sound of that name, her hand twitching my arm as she glanced across me towards the door.

‘An old friend of papa’s?’ Miss Adams explained, turning her face towards Lady Kestral. ‘Will you permit me to introduce you?’

‘Thank you, my dear,’ said my aunt hurriedly, as she disengaged her hand from my arm; ‘I find I have rather overrated my strength. If you will allow me to sit down for a few moments, I shall be grateful to you,’

She had shrunk back a little, so that I stood between her and the advancing guest. She bowed, turned, and with a rapid movement; yet not awkwardly, seated herself upon a vacant space beside the ladies, to

whom, as she threw out her fan, she seemed to be explaining her condition.

Miss Adams seemed to perceive that Lady Kestral had pleaded indisposition as a polite excuse to avoid an introduction which she had no mind to, and having returned her ladyship's bow, turned with me to meet the newly arrived visitor.

Dr. Blandly, I found, was a hale, stout, old gentleman, with no pretence to elegance, and a happy unconsciousness that his thick-soled shoes, grey worsted stockings, and chocolate-coloured coat rendered him a conspicuous subject for critical remark. He carried a stout stick in one hand and his hat in the other; and through his horn-rimmed spectacles he looked round him, at the room and the people in it, with a strongly marked expression of curiosity and interest in his face. As we came before him, and he caught sight of Miss Adams,

he laid his hat and stick on a chair, took her by both hands, and, holding her at a distance, cried :

‘ What, my little Delia ! grown a woman, I declare ! Ha’ got a sweetheart too, I warrant ! ’ (He glanced at me with his merry twinkling eye ; and, falling into a great loud laugh at Miss Adams’s confusion and blushes, he drew her to him, and gave her a sounding kiss on her cheek.) ‘ And who may this young gentleman be ? ’ he asked ; and turning to me, he looked at me straight through his glasses, with a severe crease in his forehead, and his thick red lips pursed up firmly.

‘ Mr. Falkland, Dr. Blandly.’

‘ Mr. Falkland, hey ? ’ said Dr. Blandly, keeping his eyes full upon me, allowing only his lips to relax ; ‘ well, let me tell you, sir, that you’ve got a good, honest, intelligent face, and I’m glad to shake you by the hand.’

We shook hands heartily ; it was impossible to do otherwise, having once given him your hand, for his was strong, and his arm was strong likewise, and he used both hand and arm in no half-hearted fashion ; and then, taking up his hat and stick, he asked Miss Adams where he could find her father.

‘ I will take you to him, sir,’ said she.

‘ Do, my dear. Come you o’ this side, and go you o’ that, young sir,’ said he, getting between me and Miss Adams ; ‘ so I shall be able to walk along without fear of knocking over any of these gimcracks or treading on the toes of a dandy. Well, you’ve got your rattle, hey, missy ?’ he said, pausing at the door to turn round and take another survey of the room and the people —‘ got your rattle, hey ?’

‘ Does it seem to you very childish to like society ?’ I asked.

‘Not a whit more childish, I warrant, than it seems to little miss here for a man of my proportions to sit alongside a river angling the whole day long for fishes that no one would buy at twopence the score,’ and the Doctor, turning about, burst into another great laugh at his own weakness. ‘We are all children, my dear,’ he continued; ‘and the oldest of us doesn’t outgrow his weakness. We toil and struggle, we strive and fret for our toys, and are good or bad as we think our conduct may serve to get us what we want. Show me, sir,’ said he, when I ventured to object to his argument—‘show me where is the vast difference betwixt a child who falls asleep exhausted with passionate tears of disappointment in failing to get the toy that wisdom withholds, and the man who breaks his heart or loses his wits in striving for the fame

that Providence denies : his rejected poems, his useless models, his broken sword are swept away ; and all the grand pother of his life scarce draws a tear from those who live after him !'

At that moment Signor Berboni began to sing, for we were at the end of the music-room ; whereupon the Doctor, declaring he was vastly fond of music, turned about, and insisted on waiting till the business was finished. It was a 'fantasia,' or some such thing ; and was composed to exhibit the singer's skill in execution, and all melody was lost in a series of shakes, quavers, and roulades, which were curious but not pleasing to listen to ; and I saw that Miss Adams wished the tenor and Dr. Blandly miles asunder, for nothing could have been more opposite to the taste of such a man as this stout Englishman than such a performance, especially

as the Italian accompanied his singing with the most ludicrous grimaces and contortions it is possible to imagine. The Doctor looked and listened, at first with astonishment, then with evident discomfort; but towards the conclusion, something tickled his sense of humour, and, covering his mouth with his hands and turning about not to offend the company by indecent mirth, he fell to laughing in silence, but with such a violent shaking of the shoulders, distending of the veins upon his face and throat, and intense splutterings and rumblings, that I feared he would certainly do himself a mischief by controlling his emotions, and hastily led him into the greenhouse, where, after giving free vent to his hilarity, he recovered his equanimity, but without being able to assign any cause for his departure from it except ‘the general effect of it all.’

From the greenhouse we entered the dining-room, which had been set out with card-tables, and where we found a good many players ‘hard at it,’ as the Doctor said.

Lord Kestral and another gentleman were seated at a table in the centre of the room, with a good many onlookers at the back of their chairs. They were playing *écarté*, and were very intent upon the game; so silent indeed were they, that I could hear the fall of the cards as he dealt.

Not far from him Mr. Adams was listening attentively to the exposition of two long-nosed gentlemen, whose hands were full of papers. They spoke in whispers, but I could see that Mr. Adams was being persuaded to subscribe to a scheme of which the benefit seemed doubtful to him. His thick black eyebrows were elevated, and he drew his long fingers down the side of his

long jawbone, holding his head on one side as he looked at the papers of figures.

‘ Ha, ha ! ’ murmured Dr. Blandly, dropping his voice instinctively, as one does in entering any silent assembly, ‘ there’s your dear simple old father being ensnared into another church-steeple ! ’ He advanced on tiptoe, and, coming just behind Mr. Adams, clapped him on the shoulder, and said, loud enough to be heard by me, ‘ Don’t have anything to do with it, *Honest Davie* ! ’

‘ Is your lordship not going to mark the king ? ’ some one asked of Lord Kestral.





CHAPTER II.

LADY KESTRAL'S NARRATIVE.

ITHER Mr. Adams did not know of the peril in which he stood, or he overlooked it in the pleasure of meeting his old friend. There was not a symptom of alarm on his face as he turned about upon hearing himself addressed as ‘Honest Davie.’ I glanced at Miss Adams with the unjust suspicion that she was party to her father’s secret ; she was as unconcerned as though she were accustomed to hearing him called by no other name. From her I looked to my uncle, almost

expecting to find him upon the point of denouncing the man who had appropriated Mr. Bond's fortune. With his set smile and customary complacency, he was mutely consulting his supporters as to the choice of the leading card. 'Was it possible,' I asked myself, 'that the game so engrossed his thoughts that external sounds had no significance for him ?'

I left Miss Adams with her father and Dr. Blandly, and retraced my steps through the rooms, wondering how I had been so blind as not to see that Mr. Adams and Honest Davie were one and the same. My aunt and Mr. Adams himself had hinted at the solution of the riddle, and my uncle's conduct had pointed directly to the conclusion, yet had I never suspected the truth.

It seems yet more odd to me now, as I write the history of these events; but

here these events are crowded together, whereas their sequence was broken by incidents which destroyed their relative importance. And, again, I was so deeply impressed with a belief in the simplicity and honest worth of Mr. Adams, that it needed a proof not less convincing than that I received to make me believe that he was identical with the rascal my uncle described as Honest Davie.

My heart fell within me. I felt as though a beautiful statue had been struck down and shattered to pieces before my eyes ; and I scarcely dared to hope that it might be pieced together and restored to its original form. Doubtless my face expressed the gloom in my heart, for, as I re-entered the drawing-room, Lady Kestral came to my side, and, slipping her hand under my arm, asked, in a low tone :

‘ What has happened ? ’

‘What has happened?’ I repeated vaguely.
‘I have learnt who Mr. Adams is.’

‘And my husband, has he learnt also?’

‘I cannot say; apparently not.’

‘George, you must not tell him what you know.’ I was silent; she waited a minute and continued, ‘You do not know your uncle’s character. He is capable of committing violence; I believe he would kill me if he discovered all. You must not tell him.’

‘I must know the truth about Mr. Adams.’

‘You would never learn it from your uncle. I will tell you all, if it is necessary.’

‘It is necessary,’ I said sharply; ‘you are not the only one whose happiness is concerned.’

‘You are thinking of Delia. ’Tis for her welfare as much as for mine that you should guard the secret. I will answer

truthfully whatever questions you choose to put to me. Let us sit down here. We are secure from observation. When you see Dr. Blandly coming, cross the room to meet him; this screen and my fan will conceal me.'

'Why do you fear Dr. Blandly?'

'Because he knows me; he was present at my confinement.'

'I do not see what you have to fear on that account.'

'He might tell my husband. As you see, he is a man of strange temper!'

'What could he tell that your husband does not already know?'

'About Mr. Adams, don't you see?' (She spoke with a little confusion.) 'Besides, cannot you understand that I feel some shame in having run away from my husband? Dr. Blandly was the friend of Mr. Bond.'



The explanation did not seem to me satisfactory ; but 'twas a matter of small importance compared with the main question—Mr. Adams's honesty.

'Has Mr. Adams been guilty of dishonesty ?' I asked.

'No !' she replied.

'Your husband told me——'

'My husband would say anything, would believe nothing, as it suited his purpose,' she said. 'You have heard his account : will you hear mine ?' I assented ; and she proceeded, after a moment's reflection :

'I was nineteen when I married Mr. Bond. I had not a friend in the world—I was an outcast, standing alone on the brink of ruin. I had committed a sin in the eyes of my family and of the world : I had put my whole trust in the man I loved, and been forsaken by him. I was innocent of all intention to do wrong. I protest before

God that I had not an evil thought in my mind : the sin lay with him who took advantage of my innocence and faith, and with those whose narrow bigotry pushed me on towards destruction and closed the path to redemption. I was impelled by the prospect of infamy, and I married Mr. Bond with the belief that I could and should become a good and worthy woman.

‘I invented a story and deceived Mr. Bond. ’Twas an act to which I was forced by desperation. Think of it! I was scarcely older than Miss Adams. I was without money or friends, or any knowledge that would enable me to earn a living, and I had a horror of common infamy. I lied to Mr. Bond, and he believed me. He knew nothing of women, or he would have seen that some stronger motive than the prospect of getting a home existed to make a young high-spirited beautiful girl accept an old

man for her husband. He was not long deceived. In our honeymoon 'twas my misfortune to meet the man who had betrayed me. The sight of me revived his passion ; he wished to renew the intimacy that had existed between us ; and when I refused, he had the execrable meanness to revenge himself by anonymously revealing my past history to Mr. Bond. My husband ascertained the accuracy of the charge, and never spoke to me again. He took me to that miserable house at Southgate, apportioned me a set of rooms, and we lived apart. He never took me out ; he never invited a friend to the house. Davie's wife was servant in his house. In my presence he said to her, "Whatever necessities Mrs. Bond requires you will get for her ; but if she goes out of this house you will close the door and not permit her to re-enter."

'All that I could do—all that I could say, I did and said, to make him forgive me. He was immovable. For months and months I strove patiently to obtain his pity and pardon by humbly bearing my burden. Had he relented in the slightest degree, had he given me the slightest hope of forgiveness, by word or deed, I should have been a happy and contented woman—I should have loved and worshipped him as my saviour. I built my last hope upon the birth of my child. I thought that his baby's voice would plead for me and soften his heart towards me. As he refused to see me, so he refused to see my child. He would neither come to me, nor allow his child to be brought to him. He had the reputation of being a just man: he had made his position by his perfect honesty and upright dealing; it was perhaps an affair of principle to treat me as he would

have treated a defaulter : 'to punish me without mercy, and never again trust me or deal with me.'

'When I found my last hope gone, I could no longer bear my sufferings. I felt that I should lose my reason if that awful condition continued. There was not a book nor a picture in the house. It rained every day. Davie's wife was jealous of his sympathy for me, and seemed to delight in my misery. I should have put an end to my life if it had not been for Davie. From the first he had pitied me ; he had tried to interest me in the garden, and brought me flowers and fruit, and birds'-nests, and anything that he thought would lighten my heart. I know, too, that he dared to remonstrate with my husband, but without avail, except that he permitted him to dig a little flower-bed before my window, which the poor fellow planted with flowers at his

own expense, as his wife gave me to understand with a pretty sharp tongue. Even in that horrible winter he found things to place in my way—pincushions made of pinecones, a live squirrel in a cage, and such like things. But I was growing callous and perverse. I no longer tried to be cheerful, or to look at the best side of my position. His little gifts seemed to me a mockery : the squirrel died for want of care, and the pine-cone toys were flung out of window by Davie's wife with my permission. 'Twould be better, thought I, to die in a ditch, than to live any longer in that house. At length, one day I went to Davie, who was in the garden, and asked him if he could lend me a few shillings.

“ ‘ Is it come to that, mum ?’ ” he asked, as if he had foreseen my resolution.

‘ I nodded, and without a word he set down his shovel and went indoors.

‘I heard his wife crying out at the top of her voice that he should not have the “box-iron,” and that she would tell Mr. Bond if he dared to give a halfpenny of her savings to “that hussy;” but Davie made no response, and in a few minutes he came to me and put three guineas and some shillings and pence into my hand; and, with the tears streaming down his face, said: “Lord love you, ma’am,” and then turned to his shovel and began digging furiously.

‘I left Mr. Bond’s house that morning, with my baby, took the coach to the Flower Pot in Bishopsgate Street, and lived for a month in Blackfriars, fearing every day I should be found and taken back to Southgate by my inexorable husband.

‘Then I was lucky enough to obtain an engagement at the theatre. My character was no longer plastic; it had set. I seemed to have brought away something of my

husband's hardness from that house at Southgate. I found a new life opened to me, and I entered it with no thought of returning to the old.

'There was no more tenderness in my heart, no hope or wish of reconciliation with my husband. I was alone and independent, and I found that my new temper accommodated itself well with my new circumstances. I had been lively and full of fun as a child—to the apprehensive dread of my lugubrious relatives, who foreboded that such lightness of heart would end in my downfall.

'I never laughed in the morning but they prognosticated I should weep in the evening, and took good pains to bring about the fulfilment of their prophecy.

'And now my spirits returned, but with a cynical bent, and a tendency to make light of serious things and ridicule the virtues. The parts I played with greatest

success were Mrs. Pinchwife in “The Country Wife,” and Miss Prue in “Love for Love.” But understand me that though I made light of unchastity upon the stage, and lived amongst people who made a constant mock of virtue, I was so careful of my own honour that even scandal could find nothing in my life to feed upon. To tell you the truth, every warm and yielding sentiment seemed extinguished in my breast, and I was far too wise to yield to the temptation of money. I received many presents, but I saw that I should get no more if I allowed my admirers to rise from their knees, so I kept them there. I never once saw my husband—the theatre was the last place in the world that he would go to, and I had, of course, taken another name. For ten years I lived in this way—a careless life, a hopeless one, spending my money as I got it—accepting any excitement that was offered,

so long as I could preserve my precious reputation, and thinking of the past and of the future as little as possible. Your uncle was one of my most constant admirers. As you may suppose, he gave me but little ; but he was useful to me. I have known women who carried mysterious little stilettos in their pockets for the safeguard of their virtue, and others who constantly had a woman to attend them ; but Lord Kestral served that purpose much better. In a moment of danger, women have not the presence of mind, or the courage, perhaps, to use a dagger, and servants are always to be bribed, and never fail to revenge themselves upon their mistresses for dismissal by spreading reports to their discredit. Lord Kestral was as jealous of my honour as the youngest of lovers, and had no motive but to proclaim my superior prudence and virtue.

'I told him part of my history—as much

as I wished him to know ; and he it was who discovered that my husband, Mr. Bond, was at the point of death. By his advice, and in my own interests, I went to Southgate to implore my husband's forgiveness. I shall not forget that journey in the coach. There were three men distantly related to Mr. Bond, and all going to pay him a visit of condolence. They talked of nothing but his immense fortune, and speculated upon how he would dispose of it. They knew nothing of him personally, but while we were waiting to start, the guard was good enough to tell what he knew, and in particular told me—"females being interested in such affairs" he explained—as much of my own history as he knew. 'Twas little enough, for Davie's wife was almost as close as her husband concerning Mr. Bond's affairs, and most of what he had to tell was absurdly wide of the truth.

'The three gentlemen, with one accord, turned into the Fox Inn at Southgate, probably to arrange some scheme of action, for 'twould have been palpably unwise to present themselves in a body before the sick man ; and as the last one entered the inn, I passed down the lane leading to Mr. Bond's house, saying to myself, " The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong ; but time and chance happeneth to all."

'Davie opened the door ; I had my veil down, and he did not know me. He held the door with one hand and the jamb with the other, and so, barring the entrance, told me that Mr. Bond would see no one, and asked what I wanted. I lifted my veil. " Good God, ma'am !" says he, " master was right, after all. You are not dead. He said you would come with the rest, and here," he adds, " here, sure enough, you are." Of

course he let me enter, and we went into the dismal parlour, and I could have laughed at my own folly, thinking how I had wept and fretted and eaten my heart away there in the vain struggles of my earlier life. I acted a little, of course—it was necessary ; and though Davie seemed to detect a change in me, he still showed a warm interest in my welfare. “When my master said you was still alive, I spoke my mind,” says he ; “and I made bold to tell him ’twas his duty to provide for you, and that he’d done a great wrong in treating you harshly. For I see you, ma’am, a-trying all you knew to do right and atone for the past, a young creeter with a power of good in you ; and I know you’d have grown up straight and healthy, if only master had used you as a living thing.”

‘ He advised me not to see my husband. Davie was not a fool : I think he saw

through my acting, and believed my husband would see through it also. "Master's getting wonderful reasonable," says he, "now he feels how weak and helpless he is. I'll tell him you've been, and I'll try all I can to make him do what is right for you and the child ; and I doubt not he will be fair-dealing in death as he has been in life. He's too respectable to die unlike a Christian, and he'll go off, mind me, forgiving his enemies, with the doctor o' one side of him and the parson o' t'other."

' I gave him my address, and he promised to write to me ; and a few days after I had a letter from him, saying that my husband had promised nothing, except that he would do his best for me and his child. Ten days later, as I was dressing in my room at the theatre, the call-boy came to tell me that a person named Davie wished to see me.

' Oh, what a bustle there was for five

minutes getting that miserable little room tidy !— thrusting rouge-pots and candle-ends and pomades into drawers, and sweeping my stockings and petticoats, wigs and garters, under the washstand ; for I had fallen into slovenly, untidy habits, and was a very slattern in private. It was not all neat when he knocked at the door ; the sleeve of a shift was hanging out of the coal-scuttle, and three parts of my hoop were sticking out from under the dressing-table.

‘ He came in ; and my woman left the room with a hundred odds and ends hid up in her apron. I might have spared myself all that bustle and trouble ; for Davie divided his attention between me and his hat, and never once turned his eyes to the right or to the left. I never saw a man with a face so long and lugubrious as his.

“ ‘Master’s gone, ma’am,’ says he ; ‘he departed this morning at a quarter to nine, in the sixty-fifth year of his age.’ ”

‘ I hid my face in my hands, saying to myself that surely Davie had been consulting with the undertaker to have these facts so pat.

“ ‘Oh, Davie !’ I exclaimed, after a moment or two of silence, “ did he not ask to see me at the last ?”

“ ‘No, ma’am,’ says he ; ‘he wouldn’t let me send for you ; and you may depend upon it, all the provision he has made for you and his child is due to his sense of right and justice, and not to any feeling of affection.’ ”

“ ‘ Provision for me !’ I cried incredulously.

“ ‘ Yes, ma’am,’ he replies ; “ master said all along he would do the best he could, and he did it ; and though I couldn’t at

first see how that might be, yet I see it plain enough now."

"You have read his will?" I asked.

"Yes, ma'am," says he; "master put it in my hand at the last moment, and said I might read it when I liked—and there it is, ma'am," and with that he hands me a folded piece of parchment.

I opened it quickly, and read it. 'Twas not a long document. Mr. Bond, after carefully enumerating my faults, and adding thereto his reasons for disposing of his property so that I could have no legal claim to it, bequeathed his house and everything it contained to his servant, Davie Adams. I could not understand it. I turned the parchment about to see if there was any postscript; then I looked at Davie, to see if he was making a mock of my humiliation. He was turning his hat round slowly in his hand from one corner to the other, and

looking into the crown with his eyebrows raised and his cheeks drawn down.

“ ‘ Is this the provision for me and his child that a sense of justice and rectitude impelled Mr. Bond to make?’ ” I asked rather warmly.

“ ‘ Yes, ma’am,’ ” says Davie. “ He knew that the best thing he could do for his child would be to give it a father and you a husband, one who would love and care for you both to the very utmost in his power ; and he knew that I pitied you and understood you, and sided with you in your misfortunes, and was always worriting and worriting him to get you out of the way of temptation. He knew all that, and he gave me all he had because he knew me and trusted me more than any other man, and believed I could make myself something better than a gardener and a rough awkward fellow, such as I feel myself to be at the

best o' times, and that you might have an inducement to accept me as your husband—seeing my wife's been dead these two years—if so be I could make so bold as to ask you; and he put those branding words in his will to strengthen the inducement."

"How?" I asked, fairly bewildered.

"That open statement of your past fault was given to me, I am mortal sure, to destroy if you were willing to live a good and sober life, and to make public were you not. He knew that my feeling towards you would never permit me to publish your shame to all the world unless you were so callous and far gone as to be indifferent to everything that is good. In short, not a farthing was to go to you unless you accepted the only means he saw of your being brought into better ways. These be mighty unbecoming words for me to use to you, ma'am," he adds apologetically,

“ but I have no choice, your welfare being to be considered.”

‘ It took me some minutes to see the matter clearly ; then I said :

“ “ And if I promise to become your wife you will not produce that will, Davie ?”

“ “ No, ma’am,” says he, “ ‘tis for you to decide by a word whether I shall destroy it, or whether it shall be read after the funeral.”

‘ I reflected again : “ If there is no will produced,” said I, “ the property will become my son’s.”

“ “ I suppose it will,” said he, “ Master Attorney would settle all that. ‘Tis no great matter whether he has it or we keep it for him. You loathe the town and its excitements,—I had told him so—“ and so do I. We can live in the country, and whether we have a hundred a year or ten thousand won’t matter twopence to us.”

‘ It mattered a great deal to me. I knew sufficient of Davie’s character to be assured that what was set down by the attorney he would carry out to the letter ; and if he had no right to touch Mr. Bond’s money, he would not draw one farthing from it, persuade him how I might. To accept his proposal was to doom myself to seclusion, limited means, and a certain kind of tyranny which the most amiable persons can exercise if they have principle and the strength to act up to it. Davie was kind, but he was strong, and he was not a fool. These reflections naturally gave me an air of chagrin, which Davie perceived as he glanced upwards from his hat.

“ “ We’re not . of the same sort, ma’am, you and me. I know that,” says he. “ The boys make fun of me, and laugh at my long legs ; and as for my mind, ma’am, there’s nothing in it but what’s come there kind of

natural like, a-digging of potatoes and planting out little herbs, and finding out how they grow, and what they're given us for, and the like. I know no book stuff of philos'phies and 'stronomies, and card-playin', and the like. A child can read and write, and cipher up quicker than what I do. I dursen't ask you to take me for myself ; 'tis a presumption, ma'am, which I do think I should never have forced myself to, but for your letter, in which you spoke of your dreams and Providence"—he referred to the answer to his letter, in which I had been rather poetical than literal—"and for my true concern in your welfare. Think of——" Lady Kestral paused a moment ; "think of your own interest, and accept me as your protector and most faithful servant, and be sure that I shall never forget my duty. 'Tis all the claim I have to your affection—this constant and faithful love and tenderness I

feel for you ; but 'tis the assurance of your welfare, and if trying hard to be a gentleman will raise me above my present condition, be sure, ma'am, I shall in time be not unworthy of you."

'The poor fellow was deeply moved, and in the midst of his prayer he fell upon his knees at my feet. I have only recalled one-half of what he said, for my mind was all of a flutter, lest anyone in passing along the passage should push open the door, which my stupid woman had left ajar, and so furnish the green-room with a pretty piece of scandal. And, indeed, these fears were partly realized, for while Davie was yet speaking, the door opens, and my Lord Kestral appears. Happily, his lordship's eyes were not of the best, and Davie's back was to the door, so he saw not enough of Davie to remember him. He closed the door with a sarcastic speech, and I found

myself under the necessity of bringing my interview with Davie to an immediate conclusion, for the call-boy now knocked at the door and cried out that the act had commenced. What was I to do ? To say “ Yes ” was to give up every pleasure of life—as life was to me then ; to say “ No ” was to lead to the discovery of my past faults and close the path to advancement. For I had already speculated on the death of my husband, and foreseen that I might assure myself from want in my old age, by an advantageous match, if I maintained my character for virtue. I said “ Yes,” and Davie vowed that the will should be destroyed. I wished him to put it in the fire at once, but he declined, after a few minutes’ reflection, giving me some very sound reasons for his refusal.

‘ I promised to see him again after the funeral of my husband—not to be outdone

in prudence—and we parted. As you may suppose, I was not particularly charmed with the prospect. I was no longer a sentimental girl. I had shed my last tear, and the source was closed up; my heart had been cruelly torn, but it was healed and grown hard; I thought only of myself. What advantage would accrue to me, I asked myself, by my son being heir to my late husband's fortune?

‘Davie, I felt sure, would neither touch the money himself, nor let me touch it; and my son's character was already sufficiently pronounced to convince me that when he came to his estate he would take good care to keep it for his own pleasures. I had said “Yes” to Davie to save myself from disgrace, and because I saw no reason for keeping my promise if I thought better to break it. In the middle of the act a thought occurred to me that fairly took

away my breath. If Davie, relying upon my promise, failed to produce the will, the property would go at once to my son as the heir-at-law, and I, as his natural ward, should hold possession of his estate so long as I remained unmarried.

‘Davie, of course, could force me to be his wife by threatening to produce the will, but that would be only after the lapse of a period which was, in his consideration, of reasonable length. But in that interval I might marry a man of position to my taste, and afterwards, by an appeal to Davie’s generosity, induce him to forgive me.

‘Knowing his disposition, I believed that he would never betray the truth from motives of revenge or cupidity; and his feelings towards me and my child would prevent him from disclosing a fact which would ruin my child and deprave me.

‘These thoughts were yet revolving in my brain, when the act ended, and Lord Kestral came to offer explanation and apology for intruding upon the privacy of my dressing-room. Here was the very man for my purpose. Titled and well connected, he could give me a place in society which Davie, if he spent all his money, could never procure for me. Poor and amorous, and not overburdened with conscientious scruples, he would readily enough marry me to get the handling of my son’s fortune. I told him, with some adroitness, I believe, something of what had happened; only, I took care to conceal the fact that a will existed, and that I had seen it. His lordship fell rapidly into the trap. Himself dishonest, at least in intention, he concluded at once that Davie was a thief with no better motive than his own in offering marriage to me. It amused me to watch

how he sought for the explanation I wished him to find, as we walked up and down the green-room, smoothing my hand tenderly as it lay on his arm. At length he stops short of a sudden, and cries out :

“ ‘ Depend upon it, my dear, this Honest Davie is a liar. Either there is a will in your favour that he knows of, or there is no will at all, and your son is heir.’ ”

“ ‘ La ! my lord,’ said I ; “ think you any man could be so base ?”

“ ‘ I’ll answer for the baseness of a servant who has the reputation for honesty,’ says he. “ ‘ Tis so, I’ll stake my name ! Did not the rogue seem mighty anxious ?”

“ ‘ To be sure,’ said I ; “ my husband died only this morning, and he wouldn’t leave me until I had given him an answer.”

“ ‘ And what answer gave you ?’ he asks.

“ ‘ Why, my lord,’ said I, with a sigh, and

dropping my eyes, I said ‘ Yes ’ for my son’s sake.”

“ ‘ My dear,’ says he, “ you was too hasty. But a promise of that sort is not binding, thank God. At any rate, you can wait. I’ll send my attorney to attend the funeral and hear the reading of the will, if there be one ; and, if it is not proved that this Honest Davie is an arrant liar, you shall marry him, and I’ll give you away ; but if it be—begad, you shall marry me as a reward for the service I have done you.’ ”

‘ At the meeting after the funeral, Mr. Bond’s man of law stated that he had drawn up some days previously a will in favour of Davie, and left it in Mr. Bond’s hands, but that the most complete search had failed to discover any trace of the document. Davie sat in sullen silence, and could only be brought to answer “ Yes ” and “ No ” to questions, and it was concluded that his silence was

the result of disappointment. Lord Kestral was triumphant ; his lawyer held possession of the Southgate house and its contents, Davie was dismissed, and it was only necessary to make me his wife to be master of an immense fortune. Over-anxious that this chance should not slip through his fingers, he did not rest until he had married me ; and though I pretended reluctance to break my word with Davie and marry another so precipitately, I was, as you may suppose, no less anxious to get the marriage over and escape from London, lest Davie should discover my intention, and frustrate my plans by producing the will, which I could scarcely hope he had destroyed.

‘ We were married privately at Doctors’ Commons, and left England at once, after instructing the lawyer to examine my late husband’s papers, to make an inventory of all the bonds, bills, and policies, and send it

to me in Paris, and on no account to give my address to Davie, or to acquaint him with Lord Kestrul's connection with me. I bade him not even mention his lordship's name, for fear of discovery.

' We had been in Paris but a few weeks when I received a letter from the lawyer informing me that the whole of Mr. Bond's estate amounted in value to no more than a couple of thousand pounds. You may imagine my consternation and his lordship's fury. He declared that Davie had robbed him, and that I was party to the theft, and no argument of mine would assure him to the contrary. He vowed he would hunt down the thief and make him restore the money, and this threat filled me with new terror, for the finding of Davie would only deprive us of the little we possessed of Mr. Bond's fortune. Yet I dared not tell my husband. Happily, it was impossible to find Davie without

money to pay for a legal inquiry, and his lordship had not a farthing.

‘ We had left Paris, where we had been living in the finest style, without paying our hotel expenses, and at the fear of being overtaken by the police, for the sum his lordship had borrowed upon the credit of my son’s inheritance was gone, and the lender refused to advance another penny, seeing how matters stood. Nor could my husband’s personal inquiries lead to any discovery of Davie. He had lived in seclusion with his master, and, though he was well-known in the neighbourhood, no one knew anything of his affairs, for Davie, though simple and outspoken as a child in matters that concerned himself alone, was immovably reticent upon those affairs which concerned others. He had inquired for me at the theatre, and at my old lodgings, and of the lawyer who had the management of my

son's estate, and failing to find any trace of me, seems to have hit upon the truth, and given me up as hopelessly lost ; for from the day that my husband took me back to my old home at Southgate, until this morning when he came to fetch me from it, I never once heard the name of Honest Davie.'





CHAPTER III.

OF FALKLAND'S INCONSISTENT BEHAVIOUR,
AND HOW HE CAME TO MAKE LOVE TO
DELIA.

HIIS was my aunt's story. I have written it, not as she told it, but with such modifications as circumstances made necessary. The course of the narrative was broken by frequent interruptions—I left her side for a few minutes while Dr. Blandly, with Mr. Adams and his daughter, passed through the room—by digressions that led nowhere, except to show that in all her wrong-doing Lady

Kestral was more to be pitied than blamed—by arguments in justification or extenuation of her conduct, and above all by several contradictions which provoked question, and had to be set right and explained.

It struck me, as I listened to that part of the story relating to the events that immediately followed her first marriage, that my aunt was not telling me the whole truth. 'Twas here that contradictions occurred, though in this very part she was most careful in choosing her words. She had an explanation at the tip of her tongue for everything; but these explanations did not dispel my doubts—nay, rather, they engendered a suspicion that she was conceding a fact which materially affected the power that Lord Kestral might possibly have over Mr. Adams.

'Why did Mr. Bond refuse to see his child?' I asked.



‘Because of his violent antipathy to me.’

‘Do you know why he did not make more vigorous efforts to find you and your son when you left him?’

‘For the same reason, I should say. I conceive he was heartily glad to be rid of us both.’

‘Antipathy does not justify a man in neglecting his duty. *You* may have lost your claim to his protection, but he was bound to care for the welfare of his son; and I cannot understand how Mr. Bond, if he really possessed the principles you ascribe to him, could have allowed his sense of justice to be overcome by a mere feeling of prejudice. It would not have been difficult to find you, and the law gave him a right to the custody of his son.’

‘I do not know what efforts he made to find me,’ said Lady Kestral; and then, as if she saw the tendency of my thoughts, and

wished to avoid further interrogation on the subject, she added, ‘What I have told you is the truth—every word of it ; and I fail to see how your inquiries can throw any light on the question of Mr. Adams’s honesty.’

This was true. My aunt had told me more than I had any right to demand ; and even had I found courage to ask, she might very properly have declined to answer the question in my mind—namely, whether her child was the son of Mr. Bond, or of the faithless lover whom she had known before her marriage and met in her honeymoon ? This, as she hinted, had nothing whatever to do with the honesty of my friend, so I held my peace ; and, indeed, I soon lost sight of my suspicion in the interest aroused by the description of Davie’s noble generosity and fidelity. ’Twas like having balm laid upon an aching wound to doubt his honesty no more—to know that he was

guiltless of the crime imputed to him by my uncle and too readily believed by me. A feeling of profound relief filled my heart with gratitude, and redoubled the affection I had for him.

I can see now that friendship for him was not the only feeling at work in my breast. My first thought, when I heard his name pronounced, was—'tis all over with my love and the tender hopes that have sprung up about it ; but I did not recognise at that time how much my love for Miss Adams had to do with my concern for her father.

The tears sprang in my eyes as I caught sight of them coming towards us. Never had Mr. Adams's gaunt visage looked so honest to my eyes, never had his daughter's beauty seemed to me so sweet and lovable. I rose from my seat and went to meet them —'twas an impulse I had no power to restrain. I felt I had done my friend an

injustice, and I longed to offer some atonement, if only by a cordial shake of the hand, such as friends give to a tried man when he leaves the bar acquitted.

My aunt had risen also, and taking my arm, she said in a low tone hurriedly :

‘ You will do nothing to make me regret the confidence I have placed in you. Not a word of what has passed between us must be repeated.’

This timely caution, if it did not lessen the ardour of my emotion, put a check upon its outward manifestation ; nevertheless, I fancy that my feelings were sufficiently evident to Mr. Adams, for his eyes, as they met mine, expressed something of the pleasure I felt.

I took Miss Adams away, leaving Lady Kestral with Mr. Adams, and for the rest of the evening I scarcely left her side for two minutes together. I was heartily ashamed

of the ill-humour I had shown at the beginning of the evening. Now that a fresh tide of love had washed away the jealousy from my heart, I perceived that my conduct had been ungenerous, impolite, and unmanly, and I did my best to make amends for the slight I had offered Miss Adams. I was civil to Captain Hasher and Mr. Sparks, and I believe that I distinguished myself in a verbal encounter with three or four wits who assailed me. I had the temerity to lead Miss Adams out in a minuet before a crowd of jealous rivals, and acquitted myself, thanks to her admirable tact and unseen guidance, without any palpable blunder, and greatly to my own satisfaction and hers also—in a word, I behaved myself like a lively and good-humoured gentleman, and astonished myself by my own address.

Miss Adams seemed perplexed at first by this unlooked-for change in my temper, and

though she readily fell in with my humour, 'twas clear she had not forgotten my coolness to her friends, nor ceased to speculate upon the cause. Many of the visitors were gone—a few men lingered over the card-tables—and the ladies attending them clustered round Lady Kestral, who, now that her title was known, was as much respected as before she had been despised. Miss Adams and I were alone in the music-room, where she sat running the fingers of one hand lightly over the keys of the pianoforte. She was silent and reflective. I was content to sit there and look at her sweet face. With her eyes still upon the keys, she presently asked, in a thoughtful tone :

‘ Do you like society ?’

‘ Yours,’ said I.

She smiled faintly, and bowed, but without lifting her eyes or changing her thoughtful mood.

'I will put my question in another form,' said she. 'Do you like my friends ?'

'Why do you ask ?'

'Because I am in doubt. When you met them first, I thought you disliked them, and considered them unworthy of your acquaintance.'

'Perhaps I considered them unworthy of your acquaintance.'

'If that was so, you did right to hold them in contempt, and you have done wrong in altering your manner since.'

'I see now that I was exceedingly ill-mannered and unjust. Common politeness required that I should treat your friends with respect.'

'Not if you thought they did not deserve it. I do not think—nay, I am sure,' she said, raising her head and looking me full in the face with her beautiful frank eyes—



‘sure that you would not tell a falsehood, nor act one, in any case.’

‘God forsake me, if ever I tell you a falsehood,’ I said, trembling in every nerve.

Her fingers ceased to touch the keys, and her hand fell in her lap ; she looked at me earnestly for a moment, and then a smile broke over her face, and she dropped her eyes.

‘I know now,’ continued I, gathering my wits together, ‘that I was hasty and prejudiced. Your friends may be good and worthy gentlemen. Had they been better, I do believe I should have disliked them more.’

‘Why?’ she asked, lifting her eyes again, and looking at me in wondering astonishment.

‘I know not,’ said I, ‘unless it be because’ —I leant towards her, my temples throbbing,

my voice choked with the beating of my heart—‘because I love you.’

‘You love me !’ she said, in a tone of sweetest melody. ‘You love me !’ she repeated, her pretty eyes twinkling, and her whole face wreathed in a sweet smile. And then she said again, as if she could not too often repeat the words, ‘You love me !’

‘With all my soul, dear,’ I said, and I caught up her little white hands and pressed them to my burning eyes, for they ached with looking on her brightness ; and as I let them go and clasped her supple body, they slid around my neck, and she murmured ‘Sweetheart !’

It was all so unexpected on her part, so unpremeditated on mine, that we had taken no heed of the risk of discovery ; and had a cannon-ball burst through the walls, we could not have been more overwhelmed with alarm and confusion, than we were on hear-

ing a voice at the other end of the room. Happily a screen protected us from immediate observation, and by the time the intruders had passed it, Delia had sufficiently regained her self-possession to be able to strum out a tune, while I diligently turned over the pages of a music-book which was upside down. They were two old gentlemen who passed through the room—the two I had seen hours before explaining their papers to Mr. Adams; and they were now so busily engaged in wrangling over these same documents that they took no notice of us.

'Twas well, for I am the worst actor in the world, and Delia's cheeks and neck were sufficient to convict her. For the first time she was blushing : 'twas in maidenly shame at being observed, not of being beloved. Her face had glowed with pleasure as I told her that I loved her; but

she was proud to know I loved her, not ashamed.

‘Will you ever pardon me for wooing you in such a fashion?’ I whispered.

‘You have wooed me as I would be wooed —as your heart prompted you.’

‘I did not even fall upon my knees.’

‘Why should you? I had nothing to forgive, and you had nought to ask that I had not already given you.’

‘Did you know that I loved you?’

‘I hoped so,’ she faltered, dropping her hands from the keys, for we were again alone.

She was silent a moment, then suddenly she turned her face to me and murmured:

‘If you fall upon your knees, let me kneel by your side to thank God that you and I love one another.’

She gave me her hand, and leaning towards me with half-closed eyes, said:

‘Kiss me, and say good-night, sweetheart.’

‘So soon, dear love?’ I said, when my lips parted from hers.

‘Yes; good-night. I am a little fool. I must cry. I am too happy’ she whispered.

Laughing and sobbing by turns, and with a little nod, she turned away and left me.





CHAPTER IV.

MR. ADAMS ADVOCATES AN EARLY MARRIAGE :
FALKLAND OBJECTS.

IWANTED to be quite alone, now that Delia was gone, to think of her—and her only—without fear of interruption, as, waking from a pleasant dream, one closes one's eyes and continues it in imagination. I passed unobserved through the drawing-room, got my hat, and went out into the Park. I was never less inclined to sleep, and 'twas a delight to be near the house in which my Delia lay ; so I walked up and down, never losing sight of the lights in

the upper windows of that house, and indulged myself in tender reveries for nigh upon an hour ; then, concluding that the visitors were departed, I determined to go and tell Mr. Adams at once of what had happened. The servants were taking up the carpet that covered the steps ; they told me I should find Mr. Adams in the drawing-room. I found him alone, seated in a low chair, with his arms crossed upon his breast and his chin resting in his hand, absorbed in reflection.

‘ Ha ! Mr. Falkland,’ he cried, spying me as I drew near ; ‘ I thought, to be sure, you was gone, and I was wondering why you hadn’t bid me good-night.’

‘ I wish to talk with you,’ said I, ‘ if you are not too tired.’

Was I never so tired ’twould give me pleasure to listen to you, sir. Sure, it must be an important affair that keeps you hereso late.’

‘It is a serious matter,’ I said.

‘Serious !’ said he, with a smile, after fixing his eyes intently upon me ; ‘then to be sure your looks belie you, for your eyes are as bright as the light, and you look as blithe as a robin !’

‘As well I may, for my heart is full of happiness. But ’tis a serious business, none the less, and he must want sense, and heart as well, who thinks but lightly of an act which lays the lifelong welfare of a woman at his disposal.’

‘Why, that is true indeed, sir ; but—hey ? what ? Pr’ythee, put me out of suspense !’

‘Your daughter and I have bestowed our hearts on one another.’

‘God be praised !’ cried he, seizing my hand and wringing it again and again —‘God be praised ! My anxieties are at an end, and I care not what may come. To have her married to an honest man was

all I wished for, and my prayer is answered. And you, sir, I could have wished you no better fortune ; for Delia has not her equal —she is the best maid in the world, as she is the sweetest.'

'I am sure of it,' said I, with no less enthusiasm than he showed.

'Aye, aye ; but you know not half of her virtues ; you know less than I know, and I know not all. She is richer in good, sir, than this earth is in gold ; and 'twill grow, sir, by the using—just as her beauty will grow with time. Lovely she is now to look at—lovelier than a May morning—but 'tis nothing to the charms yet unfolded. Think of her, sir, with all her noble yearnings fulfilled—her mind fixed upon one constant object, her whole soul bent in one high direction ! Think of her, Mr. Falkland—a young mother, with her first-born at her breast, and her beautiful eyes full as a lake

of contentment and joy and pride ! Think of her with your children growing up around her, yielding to her patient training, and growing up in her image under her loving care ! Aye, think of her even when her hair has grown white and her limbs have lost their youthful vigour, still turning to you with unchanged love in her eyes, guarding your happiness with unfailing care, surrounding your life with a holy calm like the glow of an autumn sunset !—think of these things, sir, and tell me if you have not gained an inexhaustible treasure in her love ?'

I was so greatly moved by his unconscious eloquence that I could not answer ; but he took no notice of my silence, for he had sunk into a reverie. Presently he said, in a less excited tone :

' And she is not less fortunate. A woman, as it seems to me, is born to make a man

happy, and therein lies her happiness. Is there one more miserable than she who fails to fulfil her part, or one more happy than she who succeeds in it ? Here is an end to her caprices and inconstant leanings. They are but the striving of a vigorous mind to find some one most worthy thing to do. I have seen young birds, sir, flying hither and thither purposelessly with straws before they found their mates, and vines that throw their tendrils out and cling to any trifle in their way. I have been mighty anxious, sir, lest my Delia should throw away her heart ; and I have done my best to show her what was good, that she might prefer it to the bad, and to indulge her wishes, that she might have no inducement to do wrong. Your aunt tells me that you know her history. 'Tis that which has been ever in my thoughts, filling me with dread lest Delia should suffer her fate. When I



first saw her, she was just about Delia's age, young and beautiful, full of good intentions and earnest hopes, and striving all in her power to do well. Lord, sir, if you had seen her taking to gardening, just because she thought it was right for her to do so, and not because she liked it—for she had no natural turn for it, and was for ever running in-doors to wash her white hands when they got a little soiled, which to be sure was a sign she was not intended for the occupation—but then she'd scratch and hoe up all my seeds and young cuttings, priding herself on making everything nice and smooth. And she'd cry, sir, when no one was near, and wipe her tears away, and try to sing and be cheerful. Oh, she had a heart soft and yearning, and had she given it to one who gave her back love for love, she would have been a loyal and happy woman ! And now look at her, Mr.

Falkland, selfish and careless, with a heart
that has ceased to beat, and knows neither
hope nor regret. And so, sir, 'tis not alone
for what Delia gains by your love, but for
what she escapes by having it, that I rejoice.
She has given you her whole heart, sir ; for
though she loves gaiety, and flattery too,
I cannot deny it, she is not a jilt. Thank
God, she has not been led, like some poor
maids, to cut up her heart in little parcels,
and scatter them among a crowd of lovers !'

We talked for some time of Delia, for he
was as eager to talk of her as I to listen to
her praises ; then, turning the subject, he
said :

' Well, now, Mr. Falkland, let us arrange
about the wedding.'

' 'Tis too early to talk of that,' I said,
laughing.

' Too early—not a day ; asking your
pardon for the contradiction. There's ne'er

a young lover more opposed to long betrothals than I am. There will be a rare to-do about dresses and the like ; but money will make the mare to go, and I warrant every furbelow will be finished in three weeks.'

'I shall count myself fortunate if I can marry in three years,' said I.

'Three years !' cried he, aghast. 'Is this the fashion ?'

'That for the fashion,' said I, with a snap of my fingers. 'Were my position made, and Delia willing, I'd marry to-morrow.'

'What position ?' asked Mr. Adams, still with an astounded air.

'A position of independence——'

'Good God !' cried he, bursting into a laugh. 'Do you think I value my child at so high a price that I shall refuse to give her a dowry ? Look you here, Mr. Falkland,' he continued, becoming suddenly

grave when he found that I did not respond to his pleasantry, ‘I can live much more comfortably on a hundred a year than on a couple of thousand, and the day Delia marries, she shall take the odd nineteen hundred for her income. I don’t say you can live as I am living now without dipping into your capital ; for, you see, I have to subscribe such a lot to keep my friends in humour ; but I think—I really do think you can live comfortably on nineteen hundred. You are not an extravagant man, and Delia, I am sure, will be reasonable. Hang that fellow with his Mongolier-coach ! I’d have seen his neck as long as my arm before I’d have given him a thousand pounds, had I known that you and Delia was come together.’

‘When I am earning two hundred a year, I will marry Delia if she will have me,’ said I.

‘But I tell you, Mr. Falkland, sir, she shall

have nineteen hundred a year, or it may be more than that—my lawyer knows; and then this house is my freehold, and everything in it is paid for. All shall be yours. Cheshunt for me! I doubt not you'll give me a shake-down when I come to town.'

' You don't understand me, Mr. Adams——'

' No, I'll be hanged if I do!' he retorted warmly.

' I must have a position of independence. The more money my wife has, the better for her and me too; but I cannot depend upon that for my subsistence. I cannot take money from her to pay my debts !'

' You don't suppose Delia would make you ask her for money whenever you need it? You don't think she would hold the purse? Why, she does not know the difference 'twixt a guinea and a shilling, save by the colour, and I verily believe she would



throw the money in the street that the man she loves scorned to share. You'll be the same flesh and blood—Gad's me !'

'I must be earning my living,' I contested.

'So you may, sir. The Lord forbid I should counsel you against that, for 'tis prodigiously more uncomfortable for a healthy man to give up work and be idle, than to give up idleness and work hard.'

I protested that I must wait at least until my means of subsistence were more certain than at present.

'I can't understand it, sir—I can't understand it at all,' he said.

'I think Delia will,' said I.

'Perhaps she may, sir ; she was mightily pleased because you refused to earn a thousand pounds in altering Adams's Hall. There's another bit of property, sir, that you could have for the taking.'

‘I shall be heartily glad to take it one of these days.’

‘Yes ; if you’re not twice as proud when you’re earning two hundred a year as you are now you’re earning one hundred. Well, well,’ he proceeded, with a sigh, ‘there never was a good apple without a maggot, though it puzzles me why Providence puts the maggot there. I suppose this pride comes with education. At any rate, I have none of it. If Delia and you are of one mind on this subject, I suppose there’s no help for it. But, ’tis an early frost on my young beans —so proper and flourishing they looked to be coming up, too, five minutes back. Three years !’

‘The time may be less.’

‘I don’t suppose it will, unless I manage to get into debt. I warrant you’d marry to-morrow if Delia was in want. My old master told me ’twas a poor reward for my

services to give me money, for I should find more trouble with it than ever I could have for the want of it, and now, sure enough—— No, I won't say that, sir, for had matters been disposed any other way, I shouldn't have the cause to be grateful which I have now. I'm like a farmer grumbling because his crop is too good, and so I beg you to take no notice of me, sir.'

It was broad daylight when I got home. I threw myself on my bed, only taking off my coat, for I had no intention of lying there more than an hour or two, nor of going to work at the usual time. I fell asleep after lying an hour thinking, and never woke till mid-day. The maid had set down my breakfast outside the door, being unable to wake me ; the chocolate was cold. I swallowed a mouthful, and hurried away to Cornhill, where, after exhausting the patience of a goldsmith, I at length selected

a ring from the number he had laid out before me, and with that in my pocket took a coach to Park Lane, testily beating my foot upon the floor, and thrusting my head from the window whenever a lumbering waggon blocked the road, or from other causes the coachman slackened his speed.

I was shown into the drawing-room, and there, after but a few moments' delay, Delia came to me. She was in a loose morning wrap of soft white merino, and her hair was caught up loosely in a knot—for I had surprised her in the midst of her toilet. Flinging the door to behind her, she ran across the room with her arms stretched towards me, and as I caught her to my heart she nestled her head against my shoulder with a little cry of joy. Presently I led her to a chair, and seating myself beside her, I fetched out the ring from my pocket, took her hand, and slipped it on her finger. She

knew not what I was about until she found the ring on her finger ; then she cried :

‘ Oh, ’tis a betrothal ring ! ’Tis the pledge of your love, George !’

‘ Yes, dear,’ said I.

She lifted her hand, and kissed the ring again and again.

‘ Thou dear pledge of my George’s love !’ she murmured, ‘ thou shalt never quit this hand. Day and night for ever thou shalt cling to my finger, as the love of him shall cling about my heart !’

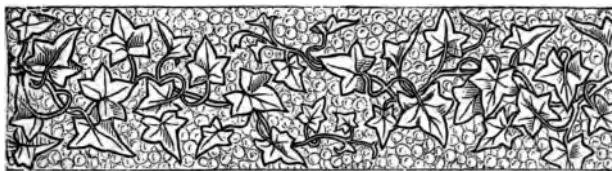
If I said anything in reply, ’twas certainly not worth remembering ; I recollect only that I got her in my arms once more, and clasped her to me in an ecstasy of love.

She had several rings upon her fingers; she looked at them, and, choosing the simplest, began to draw it off.

‘ Papa spoke to me of your resolve,’ said she. ‘ You told him I should understand

your motive, and I do, dear George. He said he believed that no one else but you would make such an objection, and he was right, and I agree with him, for sure there lives not another man in the world so noble as my George. Whatever you do and think is right. Did you bid me wait a dozen years, I would not let a murmur escape my lips. There, 'tis off. Take it, love, as a keepsake rather than a pledge, for my heart is yours now, beyond all claiming.'

The tiny circle would go no lower than the first joint upon my little finger, so she whipped the string of velvet from her white throat, slipped it through the ring, knotted it, and passed it round my neck.



CHAPTER V.

THE CULMINATION OF FALKLAND'S LUCKY STAR.

BEFORE going to the studio, I went home to change my clothes. At the door I met Lord and Lady Kestral coming out. My aunt gave me her hand, while my uncle took a pinch of snuff. When he had finished this business, and restored his box to his fob, he flicked the dust from his frill, and held out his finger to me in a distant, patronizing manner, which contrasted strongly with the warm approaches of preceding days. I looked at



the extended finger, made him a bow, and put my hands in my pocket ; upon which he looked me up and down, and with a little shrug of the shoulder turned upon his heel, snapping his thumb and finger over his shoulder at me, to signify, I suppose, that he had done with me, and cared not what became of me. I was not at all grieved by this change in his affection ; indeed, it would have caused me considerable embarrassment had he held out his hand, and proffered undiminished regard for me, since I could not have taken his hand without feeling myself a hypocrite, and was not at liberty to explain my motive for refusing it.

Within doors, I was met by my landlady, who, putting on the most ceremonious and frigid air, begged to inform me that henceforth she must double my rent if I insisted upon staying in her house.

‘ Be assured, madam,’ said I, ‘ that I shall

certainly not insist on staying with you under those conditions ; but I shall be glad to know your reason for wishing to get rid of me.'

' His lordship's son is coming to reside here, and his lordship has expressed a desire to have the whole of the upper part of the house to himself. Moreover, as a Church-woman, I have a strong objection to letting my shed in the yard be used as a receptacle for indelicate images.'

I laughed heartily, and promised I would find another lodging by the end of the week, and rid her of my indelicate images, which consisted of some plaster casts that served me as models.

These incidents, trifling as they may seem, were not without significance, though at the moment I gave them not a second thought. It is clear that my uncle had heard Mr. Adams addressed as Honest

Davie, and that he suspected me of conniving with Davie and my aunt to blind him. He had abandoned his scheme of making my fortune for a surer one of making his own, and he wished to get me out of the way that Lady Kestral might not avail herself of my sympathy to carry out designs that might be inimical to his. It was equally evident that he intended Mr. Randolph Bond to play a part in his operations against Honest Davie. These reflections did not strike me at the time; for I was in great haste to get to my work, being for the first time unpunctual, and I very shortly had a subject for consideration which drove out of my head all others except that of my betrothal to Delia.

When I reached the studio, Mr. Rogers met me with a cordial ‘Good-morning, Falkland !’ and when I had apologized for being so much behind my hour, he said :

'I have been waiting with some impatience for you—not because there is any pressing need of your services here, but because I have something to offer which I think you will be glad to accept.'

'You have been very good to me——'

'Not at all more than I wished to be. The fact is, Falkland, you are too good to be here, and I feel ashamed every time I set you upon work that a man with one-twentieth part of your capacity could do. Still, knowing your position, it would have been a queer method of proving my appreciation of your talent to take that work away from you while you had nothing better in view. To come to the point: a gentleman of Sevenoaks—Mr. Thomas Talbot, Talbot Hall—wants a portrait made of his infant son, and he asked me to do it. As I told him, he couldn't have picked out a worse artist for the work. An old married

man, with a dozen children, and the horror hanging about him of being presently saluted with the squall of a thirteenth, is not likely to take pleasantly to the study of an infant. I should make a faithful likeness of the child, no doubt—in its worst aspect; but that would not satisfy the young and sentimental parents. Now, this is just the sort of thing you could do, and do well, Falkland. I've seen you playing with that little wretch that the nurse brings in here sometimes—playing, when you should have been sticking to your chisel, sir; and I like you none the less for it. You have a pleasant sort of marrying look about you, and I should think, if you saw a pretty child, you would fall to thinking that you might have such an one of your own one of these days. Now, that's the spirit that will make you seize the most pleasing aspect of this little Talbot, and present a portrait

which will delight the parents, and make them for ever thankful to me for putting the commission in your hands.'

'Do you mean, sir——' I cried eagerly, as my thoughts flew to Delia, and the prospect of making her mine.

'I mean, Falkland; that if you will accept the commission I have refused, and will relieve me of the shame of employing a man at two pounds a week who ought to be paid twenty, I shall feel very much obliged to you.'

When I had expressed my gratitude as best I could—for despite his pleasantries, I saw that Mr. Rogers had given me the commission in pure generosity—he said :

'I would lose no time, Falkland. The parents are burning with impatience, and the brat may catch the measles in a week. Take the coach that leaves the Borough at five—you'll enjoy the ride. I'll write a

letter that will insure a warm reception for you at Talbot Hall, and you can see the prodigy to-morrow morning, and arrange for sittings at once. Can I lend you any money ?'

I had money and to spare, I replied.

'So much the better,' said he, and cutting short my thanks, he went off to write the letter of introduction, while I collected my tools and made them up in a parcel. He returned shortly, and put the letter in my hand, together with a paper of guineas, which he said was the amount of my wages up to that day.

'And now,' said he, seeing that I was deeply moved by his generosity—for this good man had a strong dislike to any expression of sentiment, though I believe he had as warm a heart as any in the world—'let me see the back of you without delay.

You must walk sharp to get over London Bridge by five. Farewell.'

Once more I returned to my lodgings to make a bundle of my clothes, which I intended to change at the inn when I reached Sevenoaks; but when I had got all that was necessary and had my foot upon the stairs, I reflected that I should have no opportunity of telling Delia of my good fortune before reaching my destination, when the mail-bags might be closed, and so no chance of sending a letter till the next day. And now that her happiness and mine were so closely bound together, I could not bear to think that a whole day must pass before that dear creature participated in the joy that animated my soul; so I went back into my room and sat down to write a few lines there and then, intending to make up for lost time by running all the way to Southwark, if necessary.

'Twas the first letter I had written to Delia—the first love-letter I had ever composed; but the difficulty I found was not in beginning or continuing my letter, but in coming to an end of all I had to say. I know not how long I sat there writing my thoughts and smiling at the paper as though I were whispering the words into her ear, but this is certain, that by the time I had seen my letter duly stamped, and turned my face towards the Borough, I discovered I had just five-and-twenty minutes to make the journey in.

I reached the booking-house at five minutes after five, and just as many after the starting of the coach. The next coach started at seven. 'Two hours will make no grand difference,' said I to myself—little knowing how woeful a change, alas! those two hours were to make in my future—and, in sooth, I was not ill-pleased to have a little

time at my disposal ; for between one adventure and another, I had not eaten any solid food for nigh upon four-and-twenty hours. I whiled away the next hour, therefore, very agreeably at the Old Tabard, in company with a cold sirloin of beef and a brown toby of ale.

The journey was very agreeable as far as Bromley, but from that point it ceased to be pleasant, for the rain began to drizzle, and there was no light to make the road interesting ; added to which, the coachman, having drunk more than was good for him, couldn't keep his eyes open for more than three minutes together, and in these intervals beat his horses to such an extent, that their headlong gallop set the coach swaying from side to side, to the imminent danger of breaking a spring or throwing us over into the ditch.

We were about a mile beyond the village



of Otford ; the coachman had thrashed his cattle into a gallop and fallen asleep again, and we were tearing along the road, which there makes a curve in the direction of Sevenoaks, when suddenly the horses stumbled over a billet of wood laid across the road, and the next moment the coach gave a lurch and fell over with a crash, pitching me and the rest of the outsides on to the bank by the roadside. At the same instant some four or five rascals burst out of the wood, hallooing and shouting, and fell upon us with a demand for the surrender of our purses.

For a minute I knew not where I was—I saw lights moving hither and thither ; I heard the roaring of the footpads—who do as much by roaring and intimidation as by actual violence—and the screaming of terrified passengers, and I felt, when I moved, the thorns of the bramble, into

which I had been thrown, pricking into my flesh when I moved. I hoped to escape observation, and lay as still on my bed of thorns as human endurance would allow; but my good luck had deserted me, and one of the rascals, having rifled one victim, and running off in search of another, stumbled upon me.

‘ Money or your life, b——t your eyes !’ he bawled, clapping his knee on my side, and thrusting a lantern in my face, that I might the better see a pistol barrel that was pressed against my head. ‘ Turn out your pockets, d—— you, or I’ll make short work with your carcase !’

I turned out my pockets, and he laid hold of my purse.

‘ Han’t you nothing more nowheres ?’ he shouted, with an oath.

‘ You can see for yourself,’ said I.

He set down the lantern, and gave a grab

at my waistcoat ; and my Delia's throat-velvet showing upon my white shirt, he lugged it out, and finding the ring to which it was attached, he snapped it away with a jerk.

' You don't have that,' I cried, throwing his knee off my side, and laying hold of his throat at the same moment. The sudden jerk threw him over, and he fell on the lantern ; but I held him by the throat with a desperate resolution not to leave him while he had my Delia's ring or I had life.

We struggled in the dark. The passengers, having been stripped of their purses, had fled into the wood as if their lives were yet in danger ; the highwaymen, concerned only for their own safety, left their comrade to settle his own affair with me ; the guard had gone off at the top of his speed for assistance ; only the drunken driver stood his ground, and he, having come upon a heap

of stones for the repair of the road, had from the commencement of the attack been sedulously flinging the flints at any moving object, and adding to the general confusion by shouting curses at the topmost pitch of his voice. Happily his aim was not so good as his intention, nor his hand so steady as his purpose, or I might have fared even worse than I did.

My antagonist was a burly countryman—heavier and stronger than I was; but the fury of my attack took him by surprise, and he was frightened by the dogged perseverance with which I held on to his throat. I had got astride of his body, and no matter how he twisted and struggled, I still kept my hold. He managed to get his pistol against my body, and drew the trigger, but fortunately the priming had fallen from the pan, so it did me no mischief, and he presently lost the weapon, probably in attempt-

ing to get the barrel in his hand with a view to hammering me with the butt. Then he endeavoured, with all his might, to throw me over; and failing in that, he, with a convulsive effort—I believe the fellow, by this time, was pretty nearly strangled—wriggled on to his side, and then on to his breast, wrenching his throat from my clutch.

‘Now, b——t you! you shall take your turn,’ he muttered between his teeth; and he drew his arms up by his side, that he might raise his body and throw me off. I made for his arms the moment he had dragged his throat from my hands; and now, laying hold of the hand that held my treasure, I gave it a sharp twist round, and turned that arm over his back. He held his hand clasped, but I could feel the velvet, and I tore at his fingers to get at the ring. He grunted. I had to do with the toughest part of his anatomy, and I might have

wrenched at his fingers the whole night long without effect.

‘Open your hand !’ I shouted.

He gave another grunt for reply.

I caught his wrist with my two hands, and lifted his bent arm upwards ; he howled with pain, but still held his fingers clenched. I gave a jerk that made the bone crack in the socket of his shoulder. The howl became a scream, and his hand opened.

I saw the spread of his fingers, and the ring lying there on his palm, and saw distinctly, for either the night had grown suddenly light, or the intense excitement of my senses had given me the faculty of a nyctalops. I seized the prize, and let his hand go, fearing nothing but the loss of my ring. Now I had that, I was satisfied. I had no wish to follow up the advantage I had gained—I bore the fellow no ill-will, so rejoiced was I with my repossession of my

Delia's gift. He was welcome to my purse, and free to go whither he chose. Whether he would have been equally content to let the struggle end there is doubtful; another hand determined my fate. At the very moment we were rising to our feet, a flash and a bang came from an adjacent thicket, and a slug tore through my arm. I staggered a pace or two, stumbled, fell, and lost consciousness.





CHAPTER VI.

THE SETTING OF FALKLAND'S LUCKY STAR.

AS my wits returned to me, I heard the tramp of feet, and felt that I was being carried. My arm was numb ; I tried to move it, and suffered in consequence such excruciating pain that a sick giddiness ensued, and I fell once more into a swoon. Presently I fell to wondering what had happened. I was not being carried now. There was a murmur of voices. I opened my eyes, and found a pair of clean white curtains over my head. I turned my head sideways, and saw a woman and a man

standing beside the bed, looking at me. On a table close at hand was a basin, and beside it a sponge; the edge of the basin was spotted with blood.

'Well, and how are we now?' asked some one from the other side of the bed, in a professional tone of cheerfulness.

Still perplexed, I turned my head, and perceived that the speaker was to all appearances a doctor. Suddenly the recollection of the struggle came into my mind.

I wanted to see if I still held the ring I had regained, and, moving my hands, felt a twinge in my arm that brought a cry from my lips.

'We mustn't move that arm, my dear sir,' the doctor said. 'Let it lie so—there. Does it pain us now?'

'Where is my ring?' I asked.

'Here it is, my pretty gentleman,' cried the woman, pulling up her skirt to get at

her pocket. ‘What did I say,’ she asked, turning to the man, whom I found to be her husband, ‘but that ’twould be the very first thing his honour asked for. I knew ’twas a token, by the velvet, and by the way he held on to it, in spite of the wound. There it is, sir, as good as ’twas found, for thof we be but poor, we are honest as the day, though I say it that shouldn’t; but ’tis more than of my saying, for Dr. Drench, I warrant, has heard as much, and, indeed, if he han’t, proof is more than wind, which that ring proves, as many women would have kept for their pains, and said nought to no one. But, I thank God, I’m none of such, and have been bred up like a gentlewoman, thof so be my husband does keep an inn, and would scorn to do anything un-handsome; for the Scripture tells us we should do as we’d be done by, and I know very well that a gentleman prizes his

keepsakes at more than their value, and gives twice what they would fetch rather than an honest woman should lose by her principles.'

'True, my good woman,' said the doctor persuasively. 'No doubt the gentleman will reward you handsomely for your services. But we must have silence at present.'

'Oh, as for that, you may be assured I shall not disturb anyone, for I'm none of your talkative women, who let their tongues run on fifteen to the dozen, I—nor such as think of their own claims before all the rest, as Dr. Spiller, who lives not a hundred miles away, may tell you, Dr. Drench, for he slipped a guinea in my hand the last time I fetched him to see the lady who was took ill in this very room, and that before he knew whether his patient would last out a day or a month.'

‘That’s true,’ said the husband, speaking for the first time.

‘*Can’t you hold your tongue?*’ asked the wife indignantly. ‘Haven’t you heard the doctor preaching a sermon about silence? But you’re like all the men, you must be talking.’

She did not cease to talk, but I ceased to follow her. I was feeble, for I had lost much blood; and now that I had my Delia’s ring, my mind rested for a time, and the babble of the landlady’s voice in my ears lulled me into a short sleep. In a vague dreamy fashion I remembered that I was to see Mr. Talbot, and arrange with him for the portrait of his child, which was to be my stepping-stone to fame and future happiness.

‘In which arm was I shot?’ I asked myself, suddenly awaking with a terrible apprehension of the calamity that

had befallen me. The dull aching was in my right arm.

The woman was still talking; her husband had left the room, but the doctor remained.

'What is the matter with my arm?' I asked.

'We have been shot through it, my dear sir; be calm, lie quite still, and on no account let us agitate ourselves.'

'Shall I be able to use it in—in a week?'

'A week, my dear sir! Clearly, you do not understand the gravity of the case. A ball, or more probably a slug of lead, has passed through our arm, fracturing our ulna, or hoc-le-majus, at its upper extremity or near the seat of our brachiaeus internus, and severely lacerating, or laying open, our adjacent muscles. It remains to be seen whether a metasyncrasis is possible, or whether we must have our arm off.'

'God help me!' I cried with a groan.

‘Do not despond, my dear sir. We are young, our constitution is good, and our bone has been carefully set ; and though mortification may set in, fever arise, and death result, there are at present no dangerous symptoms nor supervenient signs. With proper care and attention, combined with perfect rest of body and mind, we may get out of our bed in a month.’

‘He’s welcome to lie there for three, with all my heart,’ put in the landlady. ‘He’ll do better nowhere else, I warrant; and so be a gentleman pays like a gentleman——’

‘You think I may use my arm in a month?’ I said to the doctor.

‘I said, my dear sir, we might get out of bed in a month, which is as much as to say we might begin to use our legs ; but as to our arms, ’tis another matter altogether ; and though we may possibly at the end of a year be able to carry it without a sling,

I doubt extremely if we shall ever perfectly recover the entire use of it.'

This was indeed a cruel blow, for it overthrew my every hope. I must send back to Delia the ring she had given me ; for I could no longer hold her to her promise, even though I sacrificed my pride. The only satisfaction left me was to think that I had still that ring to send her ; but it did not lessen my despair and grief ; and while the doctor and the landlady gabbled on, I bit my lip to keep it from twitching ; for I was as weak as a child, and the thought of my desolation and ruin filled me with woe. I had the ring in my left hand, and I slipped it up to my lips ; then, unable to contain myself longer, I burst into tears, covering my face with the sheet.

'Come, come, we mustn't give way,' said the doctor.

'Don't you think a nip of rum-s'rub would

cheer up the poor gentleman ?" asked the landlady.

Ashamed of my weakness, I wiped the tears away, and gulping down my sorrow, pulled the sheet back from my face.

"Doctor," said I, "is there an hospital near ?"

"An hospital," cried he and the landlady, in a breath.

"An hospital," I repeated ; "for there I must go. I gave up my purse, and it contained all I had in the world. My living depended upon my right arm, and now that is gone I must live upon charity."

"Had I known that," cried the woman, with an exclamation, "I wouldn't have been so mad as to give up that ring ; and let me tell you, I shall go this very morning to the magistrate and inform him ; for it isn't likely a man with no more money than he carries in his pocket should have honestly

come by a ring that's worth twenty guineas if a penny. A pretty fool I was to take you in at all, for I might have seen what you was by the looks of you. And to think you have spoiled a pair of sheets, and that I've stood here watching you like your own mother all the night, and sending my husband out to fetch a doctor for you. I vow you must have a wicked heart indeed to be calling out when, for all you knew, 'twas the last moment you had to live—"Delia, Delia," instead of telling honest people you had no money to pay for accommodation. Delia, indeed—a pretty farthing miss, I warrant—one of your Drury Lane misses.'

'Hold your tongue this instant,' I cried, in a rage. 'I shall be able to raise enough money to pay every obligation I owe; but by Heaven, you shall have never a farthing if you don't rid me of your company this moment.'

She was much too furious with disappointment, and with chagrin in having parted with the ring, to be reasonable, and it was not until she had exhausted her passion that she yielded to the doctor's persuasions and left the room.

'Now, then, my man,' said he, coming back to my side after fastening the door, and speaking with a very different manner.

'Is it a fact that you have no money ?'

'A positive fact.'

'It's a d—d bad job for me. Out of my bed all night, you know. There was no necessity to stay here, to be sure, but from what that confounded woman said, and the ring she showed me, and, I may add, the appearance of your face and hands, I thought I had to do with a gentleman, you know !'

'I hope I have done nothing to make you alter that conclusion.'

'Oh, no ; you're polite enough for a

prince ; but a man with the manners of a chairman, so he have money, is a gentleman, from my point of view. It's a d—d bad job !' he added reflectively, as he sat himself on the corner of the bed and glanced at his boots.

'It's a bad job for me,' said I.

'Yes, that's what I am thinking about now. It's natural to think of one's self first. Put my best boots on. You see, if you go to the hospital, it's ten to one but you'll lose your arm. They've got a couple of young fellows there training for the naval surgery, and naturally they're anxious to get on in amputation. There's no earthly reason why your arm should come off, except in the interest of science; and if you depend upon your right arm for a living, you know—I should be sorry to see you going about with a stump, you know. I thought so ! I did catch my skirt on that d—d door-

nail in my hurry.' The latter words were uttered in a grumbling murmur, as he held the candle near his torn coat. 'The question is,' he added, as he set down the light, 'how to keep out of the hospital. You can't dress your arm yourself, and you can't trust any of these country folks to do it, hang 'em. They'd be sticking on some mess of herbs or rancid fat that was used by their grandmother, and which killed her, no doubt. I know these women—the best of 'em won't believe that science is better than their own prejudices. You don't want much looking to; ten minutes a day would do. You can get along without physic, unless you worry yourself into a fever. Ten minutes a day,' he murmured, in a tone of reflection, 'say half an hour with coming and going, that's three hours and a half a week; four times three and a half, twelve—fourteen—that's a

good long day, say a pound ; splints, bottles, drugs, say five shillings ; board and lodging, say two pounds, that's three pounds five.'

He made these calculations looking at the ceiling, and stroking his hand down over his mouth.

'Don't wish to part with that ring, I suppose ?'

'Quite impossible,' I replied.

'You have some friends, I suppose ?'

'Yes.'

'Sound—good ?'

'Undoubtedly.'

'Good enough to lend you five pounds amongst 'em ?'

'Yes,' I said, after reflection.

'Then you write for it, and I'll undertake to cure you, and pay all your expenses in the meantime—Mother Brooke down below into the bargain, and she shan't have more than

she deserves, I promise you. An old harridan! You did well to get your ring as you did ; you have to thank your gentlemanly looks for that. She would never have given it if she hadn't relied upon getting double its value through your sense of gratitude. We must get out of this as quickly as we can.' He gave a short laugh at this slip back into his formal mode of speaking, and then, catching sight of his skirt, began to damn his ill-luck in putting on his best to come and see me. I thought at the time his odd behaviour was the result of an eccentric disposition ; but now I am more inclined to believe it arose chiefly from the natural goodness of his heart, which made him desirous of putting me at my ease.

' When shall I be able to move ?' I asked.

' Oh ! if nothing unpleasant appears, I think you may be carried away to-night. I have a chair, and I know an old woman

who'll be glad to take you as her lodger for ten shillings a week—clean and respectable old woman—cheerful room, plain food, you know, and not too much of it, but enough.'

' You reckon to cure me in a month ?' I cried, remembering his calculation for board and lodgging.

' Cured, so that you may have no fear of the young fellows at the hospital, and can do without me. I don't promise that you will be able to do anything with your arm. You were shot with a slug, and the d—d thing's torn a piece out of one of the muscles which Nature may not restore. You may always be weak with that arm, and the best thing is to look the matter bang in the face, and see what you can do for a living with one arm only. Expecting the worst, the least advantages are appreciated, and everything that can cheer your spirits will help to heal your arm. What was your trade ?'

‘Sculpture.’

‘Ah! that accounts for the look of your face and hands. What else can you do?’

‘I can do nothing with my left arm,’ I replied bitterly.

‘D—d bad job!’ the doctor said again, rubbing his sleepy eyes with the palms of his hands; then, after a yawn, he asked, ‘Can you do nothing with your head: is there nought you can teach?’

‘I know French and Italian well.’

He made no immediate response. He had folded his arms, and sat leaning against the bedpost with his chin on his breast. I thought he was asleep. Suddenly he rose.

‘I must go home—been here all night, you know. I can do nothing to your arm before the evening. I’ll tell the woman below what food to prepare for you, and insist upon its being brought to you by the man.

She shan't worry you. In the evening you shall be moved—I'll see about the room for you on my way home. 'Twill be soon enough then to write to your friends for money; though whether they lend it or not matters little, for the deuce is in it if we can't find some one in Sevenoaks who will be glad to get a smattering of French and Italian.'

The good doctor looked at the bandages and splints upon my arm, arranged the bed-clothes, tied a piece of string to the bell-pull, and laid the end upon the bed within reach of my left hand, gave me a few instructions, and then, bidding me send for him if I felt in need of more assistance than the man could give me, nodded a farewell, and left me.

The day passed wearily away. My arm gave me such pain that I could neither sleep nor compose my thoughts in any order; and my disjointed reflections were all of a gloomy

and foreboding character. The monotony was broken once by an unexpected visit.

In the afternoon the landlord came to me, saying that the coach-driver had discovered some property which he believed belonged to me, and which he begged to give me with his own hands. I gave permission for the man to enter, which he presently did with his hat in one hand, and in the other the bundle of clothes I had with me when the coach was upset. He closed the door behind him, and came towards me, bowing and scraping at each step.

'I ax your pardon humbly, your honour,' he began, 'for venturing for to come, but finding this here bundle in the road, I thought as how it might be yours, and made so bold in the hope as it might please you to get it.'

'It is mine,' said I; 'but at present I have no means of rewarding you for your

trouble'—for I conceived that his prodigious civility arose from the hope of profit.

'Reward, your honour ! don't mention it. I'm none of your crafty rogues who do a good action to better themselves. When I see a chance of helping folks I helps 'em ; and when I see my dooty upon me, I does it, and I asks nothing from nobody in return, excep' that they won't misunderstand my motives. A more good-intentioned, civiler coachman, though I say it, don't run the London road. And if so be I do, nows-and-thens, take a drop too much, 'tis the fault of my good-nature, for 'twould break my heart to affront a gent by refusing to drink at his expense. Mind you, sir,' he said, with an air of caution, 'I am prepared to take my oath I never do take a drop too much, but just for the sake of argument, *supposin'* I did, you see as it's my misfortune and not my fault; and I'm sure such a gentleman as your

honour wouldn't say a word to ruin old Jo, if it comes to a investigation over this here upsetting of the coach by them rascally highwaymen—would you now, sir ?

‘ I suppose no accident would have happened if it had not been for the highwaymen ?’

‘ Lord bless your honour's soul, no. If I did go a bit fast, as these here precious clever insides has been prating about, ’twas only because I was too anxious for you all. I knowed how glad you'd be to get to your journey's end. Who was to see that ere billet of wood ? Why, sir, a weasel couldn't a-seen it, such a pitchy dark night as that.’

I laughed a little.

‘ Glad to see your honour is not much hurt,’ he said, evidently greatly relieved by this sign of my temper.

‘ 'Tis enough,’ I said.

‘I seed him do it, sir—a man about fourteen hands high, I reckon—sort of black man with red hair—he kim sneaking along, hearing his mate in trouble, and let fly at you with a double-barrelled pistol, he did.’

‘You saw him a good deal more distinctly than the billet of wood.’

‘To be sure I did, your honour; for I was just coming up myself to lend you a hand, I was. I’ll take my dying solemn oath I meant to help you, sir. It was good-nature all over—and it’s that as is always getting me into trouble; but I hope your honour won’t bear me any grudge on that account.’

‘Why should I?’

‘You see, sir,’ said he, twisting his hat round and round between his hands, ‘some-one let off the guard’s blunderbust, and they say I did it—just because I was the

only one who had the courage to stay there ; but why should I shoot at your honour ? and if so be I had fired the blunderbust, you may be sure, sir, 'twould only have been with the very best of intentions.'

'Tis done,' said I ; 'and whether you or another shot me, the result is the same.'

He argued a long time to convince me that I had been shot by the man of fourteen hands with red hair ; but his good intentions served him as ill in this respect as they had served him on other occasions, for they left me no room to doubt that I owed my hurt to him. Surely no highwayman in his right senses would have fired hap-hazard to serve his friend, nor would that friend, being thus served, have left me in possession of the ring for which we had so fiercely struggled.



CHAPTER VII.

DR. DRENCH : HIS ADVICE, AND WHAT CAME
OF IT.

HE doctor was as good as his word. In the evening he came, settled with the landlady of the inn, and took me away in a chair to the lodgings he had engaged for me. Then, at my dictation, he wrote a letter to Mr. Rogers, telling him that I had met with an accident which would prevent me executing the commission he had given me, begging him to keep the fact a secret from inquiring friends, and finally asking him to lend me

the sum of five pounds until I was in a position to repay him.

Mr. Rogers replied in person, coming to Sevenoaks, the following night, and finding me just as the doctor had finished dressing my arm. He sat with me until midnight, doing all in his power to cheer my spirits, and making merry with the doctor over a bottle of port, for which he sent out. The doctor had at first assumed his professional manner, speaking in the first person of the plural number, and introducing as many anatomical expressions as he could ; but, finding that Mr. Rogers was as like himself as his own brother, he gradually fell into the free-and-easy colloquial style which was natural to him. He was fond of the bottle and good stories ; and now that he was neither sleepy nor disappointed nor concerned for the condition of his clothes, he waxed as lively as a cricket.

The following day Mr. Rogers called upon me again.

'I have seen Mr. Talbot,' said he, in his careless way, 'and told him that you could not undertake to do the portrait for a month or two. Didn't tell him the reason, of course; don't want sympathy. Left him to conclude that you had more important business to attend to, which is the best recommendation an artist can have. That doctor is a good fellow; he'll not neglect you, and if he can get your arm into working order he will. He hopes to bring you round in a month or two—and so do I. Still, I should adopt his notion of teaching if I were in your place. It would kill you to be idle. Here's a note to keep you out of want' (he slipped under the candlestick on the chimneypiece a piece of paper, which I afterwards found was a bill for four times the sum I had asked), 'and if that's not enough, you

know where to come for more. Hum, ten to three,' looking at his watch, 'just time to get down to the coach. Good-bye, Falkland.'

He shook my left hand as coolly as if he had done nothing in the world to deserve my gratitude, and went out of the room whistling a tune to put an end to my thanks.

His kindness was not a mere impulse. About a week later, a carrier brought me a boxful of books and plays, labelled 'sedatives,' with just one line written on a sheet of paper within—'Hope you are going on well.—FRED. ROGERS.'

My doctor was no less considerate. Instead of coming once a day, and for half an hour, as he had proposed, he would drop in two or three times, and spend best part of the evening with me, always with a pretext for his visit to relieve me from a sense of

obligation. Now it was because he had nothing better to do, then because he wanted to borrow a book or return one; and as we both had a taste for literature, we found the subject for many pleasant hours of conversation in the plays, etc., which Mr. Rogers had sent me.

When I was strong enough to get about, he introduced me to a squire living a little beyond Sevenoaks, who wished seven of his family of twelve children to learn the French language, which I agreed to teach them for fifteen shillings a week, giving them four hours' tuition a day. He also carried me to the vicar, who was a man of letters, with a turn for versification, and with him I arranged to translate Dante's masterpiece, that he might do it into English hexameters, giving him an hour a day for six shillings a week. Thus was I now placed in a way to pay my current expenses, and even lay

by a sum to discharge my debt to Mr. Rogers.

I had every reason to thank Providence for my good fortune in having found friends in my adversity, and the means of maintaining my independence. Nevertheless, I suffered deeply, and found that gratitude for the blessings I received but ill supplied the place of hope of better. For at the end of a month, finding my arm, despite the doctor's constant care, was still useless, I began to despair of ever again employing it in my art, and upon that the realization of my hopes depended.

I saw that either I must give up the thought of making Delia my wife, or sacrifice every vestige of pride, and do a thing which was utterly repugnant to my taste. 'Twas impossible that I should earn my living by teaching languages while my wife stayed at home in luxury and idleness ; and it seemed

to me no less impossible that I should live upon her bounty, however gracefully and freely it was bestowed.

I fretted a great deal about this time, for, do what I would to divert my thoughts from the subject until the condition of my arm should be so far pronounced that I might decide upon my future course either one way or the other, the question of Delia's happiness and of mine continually recurred to me, tormenting my mind with some fresh difficulty. If I took a book, my eye would follow the lines mechanically to the foot of the page, without conveying a single idea to my brain ; and my thoughts would wander away to Delia even when my friend Drench was talking to me. This constant anxiety and depression played against my recovery by keeping me in a low state of health, and I could see that my doctor was greatly concerned about my arm, though he declared it

was going on famously ; for he changed his treatment again and again, which clearly indicated his dissatisfaction ; moreover, he would fall to cursing at trifles after looking at my wound, an evil habit to which he was much addicted whenever a matter of grave importance caused him anxiety.

After dressing my arm one morning, he began in his usual style :

‘Getting on famously. Took a bad sixpence yesterday—d—d bad sixpence !—and don’t know who on earth gave it me. What do you eat for dinner now, Falkland ?’

‘ Whatever Mrs. Parsons gets for me.’

‘ And I suppose you don’t care whether ’tis mutton or beef, or, in fact, whether ’tis much or little ?’

‘ Not greatly.’

‘ There it is,’ he said, pulling the sixpence out of his pocket and bending it between his teeth. ‘ Devil take the man who made it

and the man who gave it me, I say ! I shan't put this splint on again. You don't want it now. Keep your arm in the sling, and be careful of it. If you find it is less comfortable without the splint, we can put it on again. Did you ever see such a d—d bad sixpence in all your life ?

‘ Doctor ; I wish you would tell me the truth about my arm.’

‘ Oh ! it’s going on, you know—slowly, but surely. I wager they gave it me at the Crown ; I went in there about dusk and drank a nip of brandy—and filthy bad brandy it was, too.’

‘ It gives me more pain now than it did a fortnight ago.’

‘ That’s not an uncommon sign of convalescence. The man’s such a fool he’d never remember whether he gave me a sixpence or not ; though, as for that, I was the fool to go in the place—filthy and fiery,

that's what the brandy was. There now,
'tis in two halves !'

'Fling the thing away, Drench, and give
me your attention. You don't know how
serious this matter is to me.'

He flung the sixpence away with a final
curse, and turning to me, crossed his arms,
and fixed his eyes on my face. Presently
he said :

'No ; I don't know how serious this
matter is, Falkland ; but that's your fault.
The most unmanageable cases are those
where the patient makes a secret of his
sufferings. The poor devil of a doctor has
to be guided by his surmises, and minister
to the disease he suspects.'

'Oh ! I assure you, I have hidden none
of my physical suffering from you.'

'That's not enough, in this case, for your
body is under the influence of your mind.
You are possessed of some secret trouble that's

more powerful to do harm than my tonics are to do good. You're losing flesh instead of making it—you have no appetite—you eat less than is requisite for the nourishment of your body, and how in the name of ten thousand devils is your arm to heal without fibre and tissue? If your mind were at rest, your arm would heal of itself. Your arm *is* worse than it was a fortnight ago, for you have been losing strength in that time; and it will be worse still, unless you regain what you have lost. 'Tis best you should know this; for 'tis worse than useless to go on pumping congratulations into you that your own feelings show to be false. I have pondered the advisability of telling you the plain fact for some days, and I'm glad 'tis out, since it may provoke you to make an effort in your own behalf. Come!' he pursued, after a pause, seeing that his words had in no wise altered my

mood. ‘Come ! I think I see how it is with you. Some difficulty lies in your path which you know not how to overcome, and therefore you deem it insurmountable. I wager ten to one ’tis half imaginary, for you have fallen into a morbid state, and, like a man with a diseased eye, you can see only a gloomy cloud, though maybe you stand in the brightest sunshine. If you cannot help yourself, why not take my assistance as a last resource ? I am not a stranger now ! Why not tell me of your moral ailments, since they are most in need of doctoring ? I fancy your trouble is not unconnected with that very ring and piece of velvet which were the cause of all this woe, hey ?’

I told him of my love for Delia, and in conclusion, pointed out how impossible it would be for me to marry her if I could not maintain my independence without rendering her position invidious.

‘I think,’ said he, after hearing me patiently to the end, ‘you’d do very well to leave all these niceties of conduct for consideration when you are married. I see no harm in accepting anything that is given freely ; and for my own part, I do assure you that, if I had the good luck to wed a woman with a fortune, I’d never do another stroke of work as long as I lived, either to satisfy my own conscience or to please my wife. However, we are not all moulded of the same clay ; and I respect your scruples, as I do the Ten Commandments, without professing to be governed by them ; but I can’t, for the life of me, see why you should plague yourself with evils before they come. When you lose your arm ’twill be early enough to wear the willow.’

‘No,’ said I, ‘’tis unfair that I should encourage the girl in loving me, believing that I shall never make her my wife. That

is why I want to know the truth about my arm. If I am to lose it, 'tis my duty to give up all thoughts of marriage, and part from the girl at once and for ever.'

'Ah, very fine indeed!' said he with a grunt; 'and I dare say you think that, after your separation, you would cease to grieve, make flesh, and recover the use of your arm—hey?'

I thought that if I lost Delia it would matter little what befell me after.

'The girl's happiness is of more importance than my arm,' I said.

'It is!' he cried, with an oath; 'and if you value her happiness at a pin's head, you'll clear your mind of these unwholesome pestilent sentimental notions. Of all the strained hypotheses that ever I heard of, this is the most fine-spun, flimsy, and absurd. If you had any strength left in

your poor body, you'd be no more bound by it than by a cobweb. Look you, Falkland, be a man ; and, if you love the girl, give over this maudlin propensity, and rid your mind of contingencies that may never arrive. Say to yourself, "I will save my arm for her sake," and set yourself, heart and soul, to fulfilling the promise ; and, mark me, you'll be fit in a few months to make the child happy, without sacrificing a shred of your mighty fine principle. I'm going down to the Crown for an hour ; and if, when I return, you haven't a love-letter writ for me to carry down to the mail, by George I'll turn my back on you, hunt up the girl, and marry her myself !"

With these words, he caught up his hat, and flung out of the room, pulling the door behind him with such a jerk, that he caught his skirt in the latch and tore it half off his coat, an accident which afforded him a sub-

ject for prolific curses upon many subsequent occasions.

I knew my own weakness ; and had his guidance been even less wise, I should have accepted it. I felt inspired with new life and courage, and went about to write to Delia with my trembling left hand.

I had sent not a word to her since the letter I wrote at my lodging in London, partly because I had been for some time unable to write at all, and could not dictate my thoughts to another, and partly, in these later days, because I did not feel justified in saying anything which should lead her to think our relative position was unchanged. I did not wish her to know of the accident which had befallen me, because of the pain that knowledge would give her ; nor did I wish to grieve her by a seeming neglect. And so I had compounded by sending her little parcels of the wildflowers



I found in my walks, addressing the cover in a print-hand, which I contrived to do fairly well with my left hand and much patience.

Most people, I take it, have at some time suffered prostration by sickness, and know how readily the spirits rise and fall from one extreme to the other in that condition—with what facility the mind abandons itself to despair in one moment, and rises the next into a very heaven of hopes—so I need not here enlarge upon the blissful feelings with which I now penned my letter to Delia. The first half-page was scarcely legible, but as I grew calm my hand ceased to shake; and on a fresh sheet of paper I re-wrote my thoughts—in a scratchy, queer kind of scrawl, to be sure, but in characters not worse than those which some clever folks take pains to produce; and I must own that when I looked at the finished

letter from a distance, I was mightily pleased with my left-handed penmanship. As for the matter of it, I can say nothing, for I do not recollect one word ; nor is it necessary that I should, for love-letters, the best of them, are but poor reading for anyone except the person for whom they are writ. Only this, I know, that I said nothing of my wound, or of the doubts and fears that had so recently tormented me.

‘I protest,’ said Drench, looking at the superscription of my letter, ‘not one man in a dozen writes so good a hand with his right as you do with your left.’

This compliment, and my own vanity in this trifling matter, were productive of weighty results.

‘If,’ thought I, springing suddenly up from the chair in which I had been musing—‘if I can use my left hand so well in writing,

why should I not use it in modelling?" Benoni, after the palsy had taken the vigour from his left side, worked with his right hand alone. Why should not I be a left-handed Benoni? "Tis but habit makes the right hand dexter than the left !'

Having conceived this notion, I was impatient to put my powers to the test. I looked about the house for a piece of wax or any plastic substance ; failing to find it, I went to bed in haste, that I might be up by daybreak to get me some clay. But I could not sleep for revolving over my project, which seemed more and more practicable as I ran over the details in my mind ; and, like the taking fire of the stick in the adage of the old woman with the silver penny, this scheme seemed a solution of all my difficulties—for with the revival of hope, my appetite would return, my strength increase, my right arm grow well, my work improve,

my fortune be assured, and my Delia at length be my wife, to our complete happiness.

At half-past eight the next morning I started out to give my seven pupils at the Squire's their lessons in French, feeling for the first time a hearty dislike to the avocation (an avocation it was, in the true sense of the word), but consoling myself with the reflection that I should be able to begin my work the moment I returned. For since daybreak I had been to Otford, where there is a small pottery, procured a piece of well-kneaded clay, returned with it to my lodgings in a baker's cart, arranged with my landlady for the use of a shed which served as a storehouse for wood in the winter, but which was now fortunately empty, contrived me a modelling-table of an empty barrel, the hoops of a worn sieve, and the lid of a disused copper, set clay convenient to my

hand, with a piece of old linen, a netting mesh, and a knitting-needle, to serve me for tools until I could procure better, and (last, though not least) I had eaten a good breakfast.





CHAPTER VIII.

FALKLAND BEGINS TO WORK WITH HIS LEFT HAND.

JOHN GOT to work at half-past three that afternoon, and for a couple of hours I toiled painfully with my left arm, detaching pieces of clay, piling them up on the table, and pressing them into the form I wished my model to take. At the end of that time, as I stooped to get another handful of clay, I was seized with a giddiness, the things before my eyes seemed to be spinning round, and I had to lay hold of the door to keep myself from falling. I was standing thus, my legs trembling under

me, my brain reeling, and the sweat standing in cold drops upon my forehead, when Drench came whistling down the garden.

‘ Hulloa, Falkland, what ails you ?’ he cried in alarm, catching sight of me.

‘ Nothing,’ said I ; ‘ tis all over now.’

‘ So it seems,’ said he, with a grunt of dissatisfaction.

He took me out into the open air, and set me upon a little bench under an apple-tree ; and then he wiped my face with his handkerchief, and made me drink some fresh water, saying never a word until he saw that I was revived.

‘ What have you been doing ?’ he asked then.

I nodded towards the woodhouse. I was impatient of my weakness, and would have had him a hundred miles away rather than present at this unlucky moment. My work was obvious enough—it was brought close to

the open door for the light—but he was not content with that view ; he walked up to it, looked at the model, then at the lump of clay below, took up a piece in his left hand, weighing it thoughtfully ; then, thrusting his hands in his pockets, he returned to my side whistling.

‘ How long have you been about it ?’ he asked.

‘ Two hours.’

‘ Haven’t had any help ?’

‘ Of course not.’

He gravely searched for the rent he had made in his skirt the night before, found it, and examined the stitches with which it had been drawn together.

‘ Damnably darned !’ said he, with a jerk of his head. ‘ Thought there was something in the wind when I saw you leave the parson’s. Either you couldn’t or wouldn’t hear me when I hallooed, and I must have

run like a racer to catch up with you at the rate you went. You've gone from one extreme to the other, and I can't tell which will be worse for you. If you think you can digest food with mind and body in a ferment, you know nothing of physiology ; and you know as little of psychology if you think this feverish excitement is to last out four and twenty hours. There'll be a re-action. You'll be down in the dumps, fancy everything is going wrong, and very likely smash your model in despair. I don't know much about art, but it seems to me you have begun a complicated work—some ambitious idea that came into your heated imagination when you ought to have been sleeping, hey ? He looked at me shrewdly as he put the question. ‘Yes, I've hit the truth. Why, a simple cube fashioned in a day would have been enough for a man in your state to achieve with his left hand.’

He whistled a bar or two, ceased whistling to curse the latch on my door, whistled the remaining bars of the tune, and then asked :

‘Do you think you shall do any good in modelling with your left hand ?’

‘I am positive of it,’ I replied.

‘Yes—now. I shouldn’t wonder if you are in the right, notwithstanding your present exaltation. You may do good work with your left hand—after the desponding fit has come and gone, and you begin to work with phlegm. One thing is certain—you can’t teach and model as well. You must give up one or the other. Give up teaching, I should advise. The other stake is better worth playing for, though it be more risksome.’

‘But my engagements ?’ I said feverishly.

‘Oh, of course you must begin this modelling without a moment’s delay ! Of

course you can't stay till the term of your engagement is finished before you begin the new thing !'

' I can't be patient, Drench, at this time. I must be doing.'

' Well, I dare say I can manage it for you. The parson don't get on well with his hexameters, he tells me, and will be only too glad to accept any excuse I may offer for your absence. He wants to retire with honour. As for the Squire's family, I'll tell madame that the children's intellects are overstrained, and the anxious mother will give you your congee without entreaties on your side. I'll make that easy.'

' You are a rare good fellow, Drench.'

' That depends upon circumstances,' said he ; and added, in a grumbling parenthesis, ' I warrant you'll sing a different song to-morrow. If you don't obey my orders, you

will suffer for it. To begin with, you shall do no more work to-day.'

'Nonsense; I'm strong enough now—there's two hours of daylight left me.'

'So much the better. I've come to take supper with you, and you will be good enough to treat me with hospitality.'

'At any rate, I must cover the clay with a wet cloth.'

'I'll do it; sit you there, and give your commands.'

He took off his precious coat, that it might not be further injured by contact with the wet clay. Suddenly pausing on his way to the woodhouse, he said :

'I must first of all speak a word with Mrs. Parsons about the diet; stay where you are.' He put on his coat again and left me. He was gone fully five minutes. When he returned he arranged the cloths as I bade him, and after that we went in to my little

room, where supper was laid on a clean white napkin ; but what astonished me was to find a handsome bouquet of greenhouse flowers and a basket of hot-house grapes set upon the table.

‘Where did these come from ?’ I asked, with sudden emotion.

‘I bought ‘em for you,’ he said, without faltering.

I had reason to be moved with gratitude at this testimony of generous friendship ; yet, to tell the truth, the announcement gave me no pleasure, but, on the contrary, made my heart sink. It was such a purely woman-like offering that at first thought I imagined they came from Delia.

Drench took no notice of my want of proper feeling, but set himself to work upon the supper after serving me with such eatables as he considered good for me. He talked now and then of the gardener from

whom he had bought the flowers and fruit, of the parson and his hexameters, of the Squire's family, and ever and anon returned to the subject of his torn coat, and the housekeeper who had darned it. 'Twas a beautiful evening, and as I thought of my work in the wood-house, I bitterly regretted my weakness, which had hindered me from taking advantage of this clear light to make further progress. When the supper was finished the doctor lit a pipe of tobacco. Evidently he would not trust me, and intended to stay with me till the light was gone.

Presently I fell to yawning, and stretching myself, and complained of feeling sleepy ; for I determined that if I couldn't work that evening, I would at least begin early the next morning. Coolly puffing at his pipe, Drench glanced askant at me.

‘If you are tired,’ said he, ‘you can go to bed ; but as you’re not likely to go to sleep with the light in your eyes, and your imagination of a turmoil, I’ll stay and read to you.’

I accepted his advice, and went to bed ; and as soon as he had smoked out his pipe, he set his back to the window, and taking up the first book to hand, began to read. ’Twas the ‘Paradise Lost’ which he read, and surely I believe there is no man in existence who could have read it worse. He had no notion whatever of dramatic expression, or no ability to render it, and he gave the lines with a horrible see-saw measure, intoned with a nasal twang, after the manner in which a parson’s clerk gives out the first verse of a hymn. And thus he continued without break or rest until I fell asleep, which I imagine I was not long about ; for I could neither follow the thoughts of Milton



nor my own, and my brain, growing inactive, speedily yielded to the effects of bodily exhaustion.

In this manner did Dr. Drench obtain his object—preventing me from working, from going abroad for distraction, and finally from entering into conversation with my garrulous old landlady—a good old soul, who, being charged with a secret, was like a child with a penny-piece—not content until she had got rid of it.

I was the first in the house to rise the following morning. I had been working in my shed an hour or so, when my landlady came to me, with the bouquet in one hand and the basket of grapes in the other, and her face full of congratulatory smiles. Knowing what a gossip she was, I was ill-pleased to see her; for my work began to trouble me, and make me irritable with myself.

‘And how do you do, my good sir, this fine bright morning?’ she asked.

‘Much better, thank you.’

‘Well, I’m not surprised, sir, for a friend in need is a friend indeed, as the saying is, and I’m sure you have no reason to complain on that score ; which is the reason, sir, as seeing your flowers and your grapes set outside on the shelf where Dr. Drench put ‘em afore going last night, I made bold to bring ‘em, thinking as you might like to take a glance at ‘em nows and thens, to put you in mind of some one who is the *best* of friends, I warrant.’

‘Very kind of you to think of me, Mrs. Parsons, but I’ll beg you to take them into my room. There’s no place for them here, and I am so occupied with my work that I don’t wish to look at anything else—or talk of anything else.’

The good woman, checked in the very

outset, replied, with a toss of her head, that she had no wish to intrude, and whisked off with the flowers and fruit in high dudgeon ; and came only once again, about an hour later, to tell me briefly that my breakfast was served.





CHAPTER IX.

A HELPMATE.

DRENCH'S prophecy was realized. The reaction came. When, after three hours' work, I looked at what I had done, and compared the result with my anticipations, I was so mortified by my failure, and overcome with despair, that I threw down the tool from my unskilful hand, laid my arm on the table, and dropping my head upon it, burst into tears.

I am ashamed, as I recall this weakness—which was indeed nothing but the result of physical prostration—and would willingly

omit it, with many other faults and failings not necessary to mention here, were it not that in recording this childishness on my part I have an opportunity of revealing the womanliness of my Delia.

As I stood there, sobbing, my eyes pressed against my arm, thinking that I was worse than a fool to have written to Delia, whom now I must give up for ever, that dear creature came unseen and unheard to my side, and found me in my abject state.

‘George,’ said she tenderly, and she laid her hand upon my shoulder.

My heart leapt up at the sound of that sweet young voice. I dashed the tears from my eyes—I beheld my beautiful darling standing there. I laughed, I caught her to me, clasping her convulsively with my single arm, whilst between my kisses my lips poured forth a stream of incoherent words of love and endearment. Thus did I

behave then, who but a moment before had bitterly reproached myself with encouraging her love by a letter, and resolved that we must part for ever.

Suddenly a pang shot through my right arm, causing me to wince.

'Oh, I have hurt your arm!' cried Delia, tearing herself from my embrace.

'Twas no fault of yours, dear: 'tis past; 'twas nothing to what I suffer now, seeing my Delia grieved. Come, let us sit down in the shade.'

I took her by the hand, and we sat down side by side on the little bench under the apple tree.

'I meant to be so careful!' she murmured in a tone of self-reproach.

'Why, how were you to know that—that I had given my arm a bit of a sprain yesterday?'

'I know all that has happened. I know how you were wounded, and why, my

darling. 'Twas for the sake of the ring I gave you.'

'Who told you this?'

'Papa learnt it at the inn last night. But I knew some ill had befallen you when I saw your letter; I suspected it before, when you expressed your dear love for me in flowers. I wanted to come to you, dear; I wanted to write; but I could learn nothing concerning you, and there was no address sent with the flowers. Let me kiss you for them, darling. I do think I know every one of them separately, and could tell you the thoughts that were in your mind as you plucked them; and then, dear, I would have started off with papa to find you, for you told me in your first letter that 'twas to Sevenoaks you were going, but I thought I would wait till you bade me come, and I did wait till your letter came yesterday morning, and then

I could wait no longer. We were sitting down to lunch, dear, but the moment papa saw what I wanted he rose, and himself fetched a post-chaise, and I came away without changing my gown—see—just as I was.'

I knew very little about fashions, but it struck me I had never seen her dressed so simply; yet this made no difference to her looks, for, simple or splendid, her clothes were alike becoming to her. I told her so, and she was pleased; for she had her due share of vanity, and was the more lovable for it.

'But surely,' said I, 'unless an accident befell you by the way, you must have arrived at Sevenoaks before dusk last evening.'

'Yes; we were very close to you at five o'clock; we were just coming to you through the cottage, when your doctor stopped us, telling us that your recovery

depended upon the tranquillity of your mind, and begging us to wait in the house until he had seen whether you were in a fit state to support excitement. He left us for a little while, and, coming back, said you had over-fatigued yourself, and ought to recover your strength before seeing anyone. So we went away very sad and anxious, as you may think, dear, after obtaining the doctor's promise to let us know how you were later in the evening. He came to us about eight, and said, in his droll, pompous manner, "We are sleeping very peacefully, and after a good night's rest we shall be quite strong enough to see our friends," and he told us that after your excitement of yesterday a reaction would set in, and you would very likely need such encouragement as a beloved friend only could give; and it was so. I think he must be very clever, dear.'

'Oh, he's too clever by half!' I cried angrily, thinking how he had deprived me of my Delia; 'and the flowers and fruit, my love ?'

'He said he would give them to you as from another friend.'

'At the moment I saw them, I believed 'twas your dear hand that brought 'em; but he told me a falsehood, and I couldn't bear to look at 'em then.'

'What! you didn't care for them when you were told they came from another?' she cried, clapping her hands, and looking eagerly into my face.

'I wouldn't have 'em nigh me.'

'Oh, I am so glad!' she cried; and then she laid her cheek upon my shoulder and her lips parted in a kiss.

I did not suffer her to waste her kisses so. We spoke scarcely a word for five minutes or more. She threw her straw bonnet upon

the grass, and there seemed a little glory to surround her head as the light shone upon the silky sunny locks. Had she been indeed an angel from Heaven, her presence could not have filled my soul with deeper ecstasy. Her head rested against my shoulder, her face was turned up towards mine. She looked anxious, there was a little tremulous movement in her lips, as though 'twere the curved petal of a rose yielding to her breath ; her large innocent sweet eyes were full of grave solicitude, the lashes were wet with a tear that had fallen.

' Your dear face is thin and pale,' she said mournfully.

' Tis six weeks that we have been parted,' said I.

' Six weeks of suffering for you, dear—cruel pain and bitter disappointment, my darling, I know. But you will master every difficulty, for you are a great brave man, and

will soon regain all your lost vigour. And you will be successful and prosperous. All that you hoped for will come—'tis but a delay. You and I can never marry anyone but me and you. 'Tis not as though time could lessen our love and estrange us. I do love you now more than ever I did.'

‘ You dear soul !’

‘ And the day will come when we shall be married, and nothing more shall disturb our peace. You do not fear that I shall cease to love you ?’

‘ No—no—no. But how long must we wait ?’ said I, with a touch of my old despondency. ‘ When I left London, the day seemed so near. I said to myself that in all probability I should be established and able to make you my wife in a year—only a year, my love !—think of it, ’tis but a few months—’twere nothing to wait a year.

But alas ! now, I know not how far distant
the day may be.'

'And was it only the belief that you
could not wed me in a year that made you
unhappy ?' she asked, with a little smile of
triumph as she raised her head to look me
more fully in the face.

'Twas that, indeed,' said I.

'Then grieve no more, sweet,' she cried ;
'we will be married in a year.'

I could not speak for admiring her noble
face—for now 'twas more than pretty—and
I sat in silence, looking at her, for a minute
or two ; then, the recollection of my position
coming upon me :

'Do you know that I may have to teach
languages to keep from being your pen-
sioner ?' I asked.

'Yes, I have thought of that. Papa
learnt that you had been earning your
living by teaching, and I said to him, "If

the worst befalls us, George can still teach when we are married.”’

‘ What will the world say,’ I asked, laughing, ‘ to see me going out to my pupils in the morning, and leaving my wife alone in her fine house ?’

‘ You are not afraid of the world, George?’ she asked.

‘ That for the world !’ said I, with a snap of my fingers.

‘ Aye,’ said she, ‘ and less than that. So that you find no fault in me, I care nothing for the opinion of others. *You* are all the world to me, dear.’

‘ But——’

She interrupted me.

‘ If you teach, I shall teach also,’ said she. ‘ If you go out in the morning to your pupils, I shall go out also to mine. I have been thinking very gravely of what you said to me, George, and I know that there

can be no love between a man and his wife unless they are equal. A man must never sacrifice his feeling of independence. And so, love, if you are poor, I will be poor as well. I am ready to marry you when you will have me, and to give up everything for you. If you can work, so can I ; and oh ! what happiness 'twill be to put the fruits of our labour together for our common use, helping each other alike in little matters and great.'

My emotion seemed to choke me. I wanted to speak, but could not.

'Do you think I am a child still, George?' she asked.

'I think you are the noblest woman that ever lived,' I said.

'Then 'tis your love hath made me so,' said she. 'I have changed to my own astonishment in these last weeks. I see life and myself with other eyes. This ring

has brought me wisdom.' She held up her hand to show me the ring I had given her, and kissed the pledge of my love. 'I see now where a woman's life begins—where all her happiness is.' She took my arm, and pressed it to her breast. 'You will believe, dear, that it is not girlish fickleness that leads me so readily to renounce the mode of life I had chose before I knew you. 'Tis because I know and love you that I can find no charm in the society that pleased me once.'

I recalled to mind what Mr. Adams had predicted, which now seemed realized.

'But you have not ceased to love beautiful things?' I said.

'No. I think I love them more by loving you.'

'But are you prepared to relinquish them in marrying a poor teacher?'

'Yes, till we acquire more. There are

beautiful things in nature that the poorest may enjoy, and you will find time and ability to make some work of art for our home.'

'And could you be content to live under a thatch like that?' I asked, pointing to the cottage.

'Till we could afford a better, and then I dare say I should grow critical. But not till then. But we are thinking of the worst that may happen. You may recover the use of your dear arm.'

'I *will*!' cried I. 'I know that I shall use it again.'

'Then, knowing that, why were you so troubled when I found you at your work?'

'I was weak and despondent. I thought 'twould be my duty to send you back your ring and release you from your engagement.'

'Release me!' she cried, laughing. 'Do you think I would be as great a goose as you, and give you your release in return?'

'I am ashamed of my weakness. I was mortified by my failure.'

'Show me what it was you failed to do,' said she, rising.

I took her into the house, and showed her what I had begun.

'Tis a figure seated. Tell me about it,' said Delia.

My notion was to break through the conventional rules of sculpture, and make a statue which should appeal to the heart rather than the intellect; and for this purpose I had resolved to take for my model the husband of the good woman whose cottage I lived in. This poor old fellow had been blind for many years, and 'twas his custom to sit in his windsor chair outside of

his house, where he could feel the warmth of the sun and employ his remaining faculties in observation. He was chatty and cheerful, fond of a joke, but fonder still of showing how much he knew despite the loss of his eyesight. He recognised acquaintances readily by their footsteps, and would speak to them as they passed, addressing them by name, to bid them good-day and let off some fact acquired during the morning—the thrush had taken her brood from the quick-set, or the sparrows were building again in the eaves, or the hay was dry enough to carry in the bottom meadow, or the honeysuckle was blooming, or some other such thing was doing. When he was alone, he would take off his hat and spread out his hands, as if to take in the rays of the sun ; and a most pathetic expression of *waiting* dwelt upon his face at these times, as though he foresaw that the day was not far



distant when he should again have the beauties of the universe revealed to his sight. He realized to my mind the figure in Mr. Thomas Gray's elegy of a 'mute inglorious Milton.'

I explained my idea to Delia. She listened attentively, but, seemingly perplexed with some difficulty in the way, she asked timidly :

'Will the figure be nude, dear, or in a Roman dress ?'

'Neither,' said I ; 'the heroism of to-day is not the heroism of the ancients ; our ideas, if less splendid, are more humane ; and if we English of the eighteenth century are to be great in art, we must work with our own feelings, and not borrow the sympathies of a people that is dead and gone. My hero, patiently enduring affliction, and hopefully trusting in the Divine beneficence, shall be as I see him in his simple country

dress and homely attitude—the worthy outcome of this better age.'

Delia regarded me with wrapt eyes, in which swelled a tear of love and admiration. She seemed to catch my enthusiasm; but 'twas love that magnified me in her esteem, and I believe that had I talked the greatest nonsense in the world, she would have taken it for wisdom that passed her understanding.

'Oh! that is great and generous!' she cried. 'No one but my George could form such a conception. Show me,' she added, turning to my model, 'what it was that discouraged you, for I can see nothing that is not admirable—the posture is full of grace and pathos. I see already how 'twill look.'

Looking at my work with revived courage, I saw that I really had hit a happy attitude, and that I had vastly underrated my

achievement, considering the short length of time I had given to it.

‘ ‘Twas the difficulty of working at the details, dear, that made me lose heart. I think I lost my little stock of patience in thinking of the long and tedious days that must be spent upon the minor points before the whole would be completed.’

‘ The folds of the clothes and such like matters.’

‘ Yes.’

‘ That is merely the faithful copying of a model.’

‘ Just so ; but it is that which would weary and dishearten me.’

‘ George, dear, will you let me do that ?’

‘ You, Delia !’ I exclaimed.

‘ Yes. I could not invent—I would not like to touch the hands, or any part of the head ; but I can copy faithfully, and I will put the drapery upon the body and limbs

when you have defined the outline, and I will work patiently under your guidance, and be like a tool in your own hand if you will only let me help you.'

'But you have never learnt to model.'

'Yes, I have, dear. For six weeks I have done nothing else. For the night you told me I should be your wife, I said to myself, "I must learn to be a help to my husband," and I have taken lessons, dear, and—and—I think you will find me useful to you, dear.'

'My wife!—my love!'

The click of the latch in the cottage door startled us, and put an end to the silent transport with which I clasped my darling to me after this fresh evidence of her vast love; and Mrs. Parsons came towards us with a mincing step, her hands folded one over the other, and her eyes bent modestly on the ground. She coughed to warn us

of her coming, having doubtless apprised herself from her observatory in the pantry of all that was passing in the wood-house. She came to a stand with a respectful but a motherly smile.

‘I’ve laid your breakfast, Mr. Falkland, sir, in the kitchen,’ said she; ‘and I’ve a-made so bold as to lay a extry bowl in case the young lady might like to stay and take a bit with you in our country fashion.’

Delia looked at me, and clasping her hands, said :

‘Oh ! I should like that beyond every-thing ; but——’ her face grew suddenly grave, and then broke into a merry smile. ‘Papa’s waiting outside. I forgot all about him.’

‘He is in the lane, and has been waiting all this time for you ?

‘Yes. He knew that I wanted to see you alone,’ Delia said, dropping her voice,

and pinching my hand that hung near hers.

‘If ‘tis the gentleman in the silk stockings, miss,’ said Mrs. Parsons, ‘he’s a-walking with my good man in the front garden, and a-talking about bees and carrots; I’ll go fetch him at once, and if he’s of the same mind as your ladyship, ‘tis but to put another pint of new milk in the pipkin, for there’s butter a plenty, and a new loaf of my own baking, though I says it as shouldn’t, that’s enough for all.’

She went before; and Delia, with a little fluttering sigh of happiness, took my arm, and we followed.

The kitchen was as clean as hands could make it. The little windows, with their many-tinged panes of glass, screened by white dimity curtains, looped up neatly with sample-stitched bands, and the widespread fuchsias, let in but little light; but

the door was set wide open, and the sunlight streamed in, showing the quaint staircase that led up to my room, the tall old clock, the highly coloured Christmas-carol in its frame, decorated with fir cones; the snowy dresser, with its rows of brightly shining plates and its tea-board painted with a view of Mount Vesuvius, and all the objects on that side of the room, while the rest lay in an agreeable shade. There was a pleasant smell of boiled milk ; the table, covered with a spotless cloth, well pressed, was set with two white bowls, a pat of primrose-coloured butter, and a mountainous well-baked loaf of bread.

Delia looked round the room, and then at the preparation for our breakfast, and then up at me, her bright eyes twinkling and her cheeks flushing. She pressed my arm closer, and, standing on tiptoe, whispered :

‘ I feel as though we were already married, dear ! ’



CHAPTER X.

DELIA'S DEVOTION.

DHAVE heard it maintained that to the resolute nothing is impracticable; and my Delia proved the truth of this assertion, and her own firm purpose, by carrying out her project in spite of all the difficulties which opposed it. I know that not one girl in ten thousand could do what she did ; but I know also that not one in ten thousand or ten hundred thousand could love as she loved.

She would not return to London ; she would not leave me again for a day ; she



insisted upon beginning at once, and she would accept no compromise.

‘I *can’t* understand it,’ said Honest Davie, laying a long stress on the ‘*can’t*’—
‘I *can’t* understand it anyhow.’ I don’t hold out for Park Lane, seeing that Mr. Falkland is more likely to get strong in a short time in the country ; but what’s the matter with Adams’s Hall ? We arranged, Delia and me, to shut up the London house and go there in a fortnight, and everything will be nice and comfortable by that time. A lot of friends have promised to come and stay with me, and we shall be as gay as crickets. In the meantime, we could go to Bath or Cheltenham or Tunbridge, or any place where the water’s nasty, and that ought to suit your taste, Mr. Falkland.’

‘I *can’t* afford to take a long holiday,’ said I.

‘Well, say a week—that’s not long ; and

I wager by that time I'll have everything ready at the Hall.'

'We are going to work here, papa. I can sleep at the inn until the Hall is ready, and then I shall drive over every morning and go back at night when we can't see to work any longer.' Her eyes sparkled with pleasant anticipation.

'I *can't* understand it,' reiterated Davie slowly, as he looked round the little wood-house. 'This shed is a good sort of a shed for gardening tools and pots and barrows and such like; but I don't see why you can't make your images just as well in that big front-room at Adams's Hall. You could have servants to clean up the mess after you, and do just as you like. Choose your own set of rooms, Mr. Falkland; order what you please for dinner; have whatever friends you choose to see you—the more the merrier; rise when you

like, lie down when you feel a bit tired ; go out for a stroll, or a game of bowls, when you want a change. 'Tis your old home, sir ; you'll feel at your ease, no one will trouble you. It don't sound uncomfortable, do it ?

'No ; but a little too comfortable,' said I.

'Not a bit, sir, asking your pardon for the contradiction. 'Tis much easier to stick to a thing when it's agreeable than to hang on to it when it's going contrary. 'Tis like horse-riding,' he added, after a moment's reflection. 'While the animal goes along smooth and even you feel as if you could stop on him for a month ; but when a butcher's boy gives him a cut, and he takes to walking about on his hind-legs, and then lifting them up in the air, you feel grateful when he pitches you off and leaves you in the middle of the road. 'Tisn't a bad shed,'

he repeated, casting another critical glance around, ‘but a blusterous east wind would blow smack in through that door, and maybe the next time there comes a smart shower you'll find the water coming through the thatch. I don't say this to put you out of heart, Delia, my dear. God forbid! This notion of helping your husband is a fine notion—one of the finest you've ever had; and just for that reason I should be sorry if the disagreeables of working in a shed should lead you to give it up.’

‘I shall not give it up,’ said Delia quietly.

‘ ’Tis not at all like any other notion I have had, and I beg you to let me have my own way.’

‘I never thwarted you in anything, dear, and I shan't begin now,’ said Davie; and he said no more at that time.

I might have yielded at once to these persuasions had Delia supported them, for

I was no less fearful than Davie lest she should be discouraged by the inconveniences he hinted at; but she seemed to see this, and grew firmer than ever.

‘We will begin, dear, as we may have to go on,’ she said to me. ‘When we can afford to have a fine study of our own, we will have one.’

I think she wished to show me that she could bear hardships—that her devotion to art and to me was not a mere whim, which owed its charm to novelty, and that she was something more than a pretty girl with a romantic disposition. I know she was delighted when the prognosticated smart shower came on the third day of our joint labours, and a drop of water fell plump on her work, obliging her to shift it to another place. After the rain came the east wind, sweeping down the pungent smoke from a neighbouring bonfire into

our rude study. Then Drench, paying us a visit, clumsily stuck his elbow against Delia's model, obliterating the successful work of a day. But these misfortunes only animated her with new zeal. She said nothing, but her glance seemed to say: ' You see that I am in earnest, and that I am brave.'

When Davie found that he could not dissuade Delia from her purpose, he did his best to aid her in it. He started for London as soon as the discussion was ended with a list of the things she required, and returned with them in the evening, when, looking at the work Delia had done in his absence, he lifted up his hands in admiration, and expressed his astonishment in many disjointed exclamations, such as ' Ad's my life!' ' Hearts o' me!' ' Good o' gracious!' and the like; though at that early stage there was nothing for an un-

trained eye to admire, and I fancy he would have been sorely puzzled to tell what the figure was meant to represent.

I had made up a table for Delia, and we worked upon separate models. Mine was necessarily rough, for 'twas only with painful effort I could put finish upon my work. I aimed mainly at giving a correct anatomical outline and a suitable expression to the figure, and in this I succeeded slowly, but fairly well. Delia, with remarkable swiftness and fidelity, copied my work, seizing my intention at once, and rendering it with extreme delicacy and precision. Her nimble fingers kept pace with mine, albeit they had to perform a dozen times the amount of labour in manipulating the details which my work merely suggested.

I was not less astonished than delighted with her ability, which became more evident as the nervousness with which she began

what was to her the most important attempt of her life wore off, and she worked with greater freedom ; and it needed all my self-control to refrain from expressing my admiration. The joy I felt in her success took such hold upon me, that I would sometimes work for half an hour or so in a futile way, not knowing what I did. 'Twas hard, indeed, to keep my eyes away from her dainty person, and that lovely face which looked lovelier still for its expression of noble ardour, but harder still to distract my thoughts from her devotion to me. Happily for the progress of our work, her earnest mind was too absorbed in study to partake of my inquietude.

No one would have guessed that we were lovers, who for the first time saw us modelling there. We worked in perfect silence, save when a necessary question was to be asked and answered, and then we spoke in

brief sentences, and with the cold dry tone—~~s~~—
of teacher and pupil.

When I looked at her work, she watched ~~at~~ ~~on~~ my face eagerly to catch my opinion, for I abstained as much as I could from praising ~~me~~ her. Praise did her more harm than good—— it intoxicated her, and unfitted her for steady ~~my~~ work. 'Tis to most of us like wine—— a little is good, but in excess 'tis pernicious, and I truly believe that art suffers ~~ten~~ times more by praise than by neglect. In this case 'twas particularly dangerous, for generally it was accompanied with some expression of tenderness that took our thoughts from our work to ourselves, and made it difficult to separate and fix them again upon our work.

I remember—'twas the third day, an old Mr. Parsons was sitting to us—she asked me to see if her treatment of the old man's coat-sleeve was right. I w

so struck with admiration at what I saw
that I lost my customary reserve.

‘ ‘Tis astonishing !’ I said, bending over the
model.

‘ Astonishing ! have I made some stupid
blunder ?’ she asked, in alarm.

‘ No !’ said I, ‘ ‘tis the perfection of your
hand that astonishes me.’

‘ ‘Tis your hand, my darling !’ she cried,
and then down went the tool, and she flung
her arms about my neck, and we did no
more work for half an hour. After this
break we worked on steadily for an hour,
and then she called me again to look at her
work.

‘ That is nearer perfection, I think,’ said
she.

I laughed at first to see how she had been
working up the folds I had praised, and
then I felt sorry, for she had ruined a piece
of fine bold work by excessive elaboration.

I told her the fault she had made, and pointed out that the art of a sculptor, or a painter, or a writer, lies not in producing every detail that meets the eye, but in making a judicious selection of those which are fittest to illustrate the leading idea.

‘Thank you, dear,’ she said, when I had finished, and without another word, she pressed out the faulty work, and set herself to remodel it; and so an afternoon was lost, for the remainder was spent in restoring the original folds, which, however, she failed to do to her satisfaction.

After that, if there was any comment to make, ‘twas reserved until the work of the day was finished.

We had our good days and our bad days. When they were good we rejoiced, when they were bad we consoled ourselves with hopes of a better to-morrow; but there was

no day which was not fraught with happiness.

At the end of ten days, the model was so near completion, that we began to discuss the ways and means of making the copy, which was to be of life-size. One thing was clear—either the wood-shed must be greatly altered, or we must find another and fitter place to work in.

Davie took advantage of this opportunity to renew his arguments in favour of our working at Adams's Hall, and in a very original and characteristic manner.

'Look here, Mr. Falkland, sir,' said he, taking me aside after we had been casting about for a method of enlarging the shed without running the risk of bringing the whole structure down on our heads. 'I am beginning to see the working of this pride which has puzzled me so long. The more unpleasant a thing is, the more pleasure you

feel in sticking to it. It *ain't* like horse-riding ; though maybe horse-riding would have the same charms for me if I had any pride in me. Now, I want you to be reasonable and be guided by your own principles. You've had rain and you've had wind, and you've had enough smoke from that bonfire to p'isen you ; and if you insist upon staying and working in that wood-shed, Delia will have to spend six hours a-day in coming to and fro between this and Adams's Hall ; and one fine day, the likelihood is, that if you take the side out of the shed, as you propose, the whole thing will come down with a run, destroying at one go this piece of work you build all your hopes on, and ten chances to one maiming you or Delia into the bargain. Now, I ask you, sir, if all these discomforts are outweighed by the unpleasantness of working at Adams's Hall ; because if they are, you ought, accord-

ing to your own principles, to prefer the latter.'

I laughed at his sophistry; but Davie's lugubrious visage was unaltered.

'Tis no laughing matter, sir, for me,' said he, 'and if you will not do this thing for your own sake, I beg you to do it for mine. For if you refuse to accept any help, 'twill be said that you scorn to touch my money because 'twas dishonestly come by.'

'But I do not believe that 'twas dishonestly come by.'

He glanced at the shed where Delia was still at work, and drawing me a little further away, said :

'I know that you have faith in my honesty, but there are others who have not.'

'You mean my uncle, Lord Kestral.'

He nodded his head.

'What does it matter what he thinks?' I asked.



‘It matters a good deal what he says and leads others to think.’

‘But you can prove your innocence,’ I said.

He was silent for a minute, and then he said quietly :

‘No, I can’t.’

I became silent in my turn. I did not for a moment think that I had been deceived by his simplicity, that he was a thief, that he had misappropriated Mr. Bond’s fortune. I thought that, trusting in Mrs. Bond’s promise to become his wife, he had destroyed the will that could bring her to shame. I waited, expecting he would make some sort of explanation of the circumstances to me.

‘I can’t even prove it to you,’ he said, as if he saw and wished to set at rest my expectation.

‘Well,’ said I, after a pause, ‘after all,

what does it matter what Lord Kestral says, or his friends think ? Your true friends will always believe in you. Delia no longer cares for the society you entered for her sake, and I feel sure that you care still less for these fine personages. Why should you not shut your door against them and live in the mode that better pleases you ? You were happier at Cheshunt.'

'I can't go back to Cheshunt. Why, sir, 'twould be said that I was a designing knave, who has assumed a position with my ill-gotten riches to marry my daughter into a good family, whose name would shield my conduct from inquiry.'

Again I asked what it mattered whether the world's opinion was good or bad.

'It matters a vast deal more than you think, sir,' said he ; 'here comes Delia. Her happiness and mine are at stake. I beg you to agree to my request.'

He spoke hurriedly and earnestly. It seemed to me that Delia would never comply with his desire.

'What are you talking about with such gravity?' asked Delia, coming to us.

'Talking about the inconveniences of working here,' said I. 'I want to finish our work at the Hall.'

'Then we'll go there, dear,' said she, as cheerfully as though it had never been in her mind to object. Indeed, had I asked her to start that moment for the world's end, I believe she would have complied as readily.





CHAPTER XI.

THE BEGINNING OF DAVIE'S DIFFICULTIES.

DRENCH came in to see me soon after this arrangement was decided, and I told him of my intention, for I had contracted a strong affection for the eccentric doctor, and made no concealment of my affairs from him. He laughed heartily at this turn in my disposition.

‘A week ago,’ said he, ‘you’d have forbidden me to speak to you again if I had suggested the possibility of your doing such a thing; and have tortured yourself with



I know not how many poignant scruples at the very thought of it. Well, a man who hasn't common health, can't be expected to have common sense. Thank God! your morbid sentimentality is going ; 'tis a sure sign that your strength is returning. You may do what you please with your arm now ; I can be of no further use to you. Not that I intend to leave you on that account. I shall constitute myself family doctor to Mr. Adams.' He looked at me with a roguish twinkle in his eye, and after chuckling at his own unspoken thoughts, he continued : 'I wager I shall be called for within eighteen months, Falkland.'

'So be it,' said I curtly, not relishing his ~~s~~ pleasantry.

'Aye ; but you needn't look as if you ~~w~~ didn't mean it. Confound this excessive ~~e~~ delicacy, which must stop a man's mouth ~~w~~ from wishing his friend the greatest joy h ~~e~~

can have. You'll be married before Christmas, or I'm a Dutchman and you're not flesh and blood. As for your scruples, you'll get better of them as you get better of your wound, by being in the company of Miss Adams. Your healthy man, Falkland, has barely enough principle to keep him out of gaol ; look at the gipsy. Brigands, in general, are remarkable for robust constitutions. I have never suffered a day's illness, and I've no more sentiment than a tom-cat. The only remorse I have suffered has been caused by that poisonous brandy at the Lion. I shall come and see you frequently at Adams's Hall, and Adams shall pay for my visits.'

In the evening Delia and I, with Davie, drove to Maplehurst in an open coach, and I think I never in my life did so enjoy a drive. Our road lay between high, sandy banks, dressed with tufts of huckle and



purple heath and trailing brambles, and over our heads the larches made a delicate canopy ; and then we came upon trim orchards, where red apples bore down the branches with their weight, and cows grazing in the shade turned their sleepy eyes to watch us pass, and upon hop-gardens all festooned with the gracefully twining vines ; and we passed over a stretch of common-land, ragged with furze and brake and broom ; and then a village green, with its pond and flock of grey geese busily nibbling the short grass, and its ale-house, where the yeomen and smocked peasants sat smoking their clay pipes in serious silence ; and wound through pleasant avenues of elms, with wide-spreading fields of corn on either hand ; and then by the side of a hill, thickly wooded with dark oak and darker firs, stretching downwards to a valley threaded with a stream, and

verdured with grass of the tenderest green; and so on to the brow of the hill, where the vast Weald of Kent lay spread out before us, looking like an interminable and desert forest, but for here and there a little haze of blue smoke, a church spire, or the red cowl of a hop-kiln, which showed that the homes of men were there.

‘Sure, ‘tis the sweetest country in the world,’ said Delia.

‘Aye, and this is the sweetest time to see it, love,’ I whispered, touching her hand.

‘You’ll be married before Christmas, or I’m a Dutchman and you’re not flesh and blood.’ Those absurd words of Drench’s kept returning to my mind, like the remembrance of a melody which one may try in vain to get rid of; and though I said to myself that the notion was preposterous to think of at such a time as this, when I was actually without means of independent

subsistence, yet, nevertheless, it gave me a certain measure of delight, so the country and my Delia looked most charming when the thought was running through my head.

Honest Davie was particularly anxious that I should approve of the alterations that had been made in the Hall, seeming to regard me as the absolute owner of the house, and himself merely as a steward responsible for its well-being.

'I've carried out your suggestions, sir,' said he, 'according to my lights, and I hope there's nothing to laugh at. With regard to the outside, I would let the architect go no further than the steps, the balustrade and the founting, all of which, he tells me, are in keeping with the style of the house. The garden I think I may say I have improved, and the bowling-green is as nigh perfection as two men and a boy

with a roller can bring it. As to the inside of the house, that's pretty much as you saw it last ; for nothing much has been done in it save a mort of scrubbing and scouring, and polishing and furbishing up generally. All the old picters and furniture is just where it was, and I've only made bold to bring down a few cart-loads of gimcracks that Delia cottons to ; they can all go back to-morrow if she thinks fit. I don't say, my dear,' he added, turning to her, ' but what the whole thing would have been better done if you had been about, to say what was right and what was wrong ; but, you see, you was otherwise employed, and I had no one to consult except Miss Dobson, who has had her hands full of servants and linen and such like.'

'I fear I am prodigious selfish,' cried Delia, hanging her head ; then suddenly raising it and looking at her father, she

caught up his hand and kissed it, crying, 'Oh, you are a dear, loving, good father. Think, George,' turning to me, 'he has been posting from Sevenoaks hither, hither to London, and thence to Sevenoaks, a dozen times in the last week, thinking of me and of you, and how he could gratify our tastes and wishes, suffering all sorts of inconvenience and discomfort, quite neglected and uncared-for by me, while we have been working in continual happiness and thinking only of ourselves.'

'A fiddlestick's end for my merit!' cried Davie. 'I warrant you I should have ~~—~~ done nothing of the sort if it hadn't ~~—~~ given me pleasure to do it. There, what ~~—~~ think ye of that bowling-green, Mr. ~~—~~ Falkland ?'

"Tis as smooth as a sheet of new velvet!" ~~—~~ said I, looking at the greensward with its ~~—~~ closely clipped yew-hedge, which we were ~~—~~

at that moment passing ; ‘ and I hope before long to play you a game on it.’

‘ Aye, sir, aye ; all in good time.’

The footboy had run on in advance to announce our coming, and at the north door Miss Dobson came to meet us with a courtesy, while the servants assembled in the hall to receive their young mistress.

We passed through the hall, and so by the east door on to the terrace ; for Delia was impatient to see the improvements that had been made. Nor were we slow to express our delight, for, in addition to the marble, properly toned to harmonize with the weather-stained façade of the house, which lent elegance and a certain degree of grandeur to the fine expanse of well-shaven lawn, there were flowers of every tint in profusion, planted along the side beds, upon the terrace, and in the handsome vases along the balustrade. And to hear our

genuine praise, Davie rubbed his hands in glee.

‘I must wear silk and satin and velvet, and a hat with a broad brim and a long ostrich feather, to be in keeping with this beautiful scene,’ said Delia ; then, turning to me, she added, ‘when we have made our fortunes, dear, and can afford to live in such style.’

It pleased me to find that my sweetheart’s resolution was not shaken by temptation ; for I own that my mind misgave me when I saw her delight in the midst of these fine surroundings, and noticed how her eyes sparkled at the thought of the silks and satins in which she should so becomingly be dressed.

Davie would have had us take the best and largest room in the house for our work ; but this we declined, and gave our preference to an outhouse where we could work

in greater seclusion ; for we had no wish to make a show of our undertaking, or to provide a subject for the surmises and speculations of people who would not be able to understand or justly appreciate our motives.

After supper, Delia and I left Davie to read his letters, of which a bagfull awaited his attention, and spent a most delightful hour in walking upon the terrace, where we discoursed upon love and happiness, matter which loses its charm in being writ. Miss Dobson took her away from me, saying the night was chill ; and indeed, as I kissed my darling's cheek, bidding her good-night, it was cool and like a rose in the morning.

I walked for some time longer on the terrace, thinking of Delia. The moon was rising over the trees : its lower half was yet partly hidden by the foliage. I stopped,

asking myself if anything in this lovely night was so lovely as my dear. The spray from the fountain, sparkling in the moonlight, was not so lustrous as her eyes ; the fall of the waters was not so musical as her voice ; the perfume of the flowers not so sweet as her breath—these things could not compare with her. I had not seen their beauty when she was by ; and all the charms they now had in my eyes they owed to her, like water by night which does but faintly reflect the glories of the heavens.

‘ What are you looking at, George, dear ? ’

’Twas my Delia who spoke from a window above.

I told her my thoughts. She listened to — the end ; and then, with a little dove-like — cry of delight, she tore a cluster of roses — from the casement-side, pressed them to — her lips again and again, and threw them — down to me.

When I entered the house, I found Davie with two piles of opened letters before him, and a folded letter in his hand, with which he was thoughtfully scraping his long jaw.

'Don't let me interrupt you,' said I, as he rose to meet me, laying down the letter.

'As for that, sir,' said he, 'I shall be only too glad to have half-an-hour's rest, if you will give me the excuse for taking it.'

'You have plenty of work before you, if you intend answering all these letters,' said I, sitting down by the table.

'They'll keep me going best part of the night, I warrant. Letters seem to me like weeds in a garden: if you don't get rid of 'em at once, there's no getting rid of 'em at all. That lot's from people I don't know,' he pointed to the larger heap. 'People in misfortune—widows and orphans, poor



souls ! tradesmen on the brink of ruin, and poets on the verge of insanity. A trifle of money and a couple of words, that's all they want. 'Tis the easiest part of my work.'

' And the pleasantest, I should think.'

' Yes, sir. Miss Dobson don't have to look over the answers to them to see if the spelling's right ; and there's no fear of the letters being handed about for a laughing-stock. This is the lot that breaks my heart,' he brought his fist down on the lesser pile ; ' letters about nothing, that have to be answered in the same spirit. It's like watering plants with a leaky pot. You don't do what you want to do, and you make yourself in a mess. There's not a word I write to these people but what will be looked at through a dozen eye-glasses and made fun of. I begin to know my friends.'

' I shouldn't answer their letters.'

' Asking your pardon, Mr. Falkland, I think you would, sir; for I take it, you wouldn't put yourself on a level with them, even in such a trifle as want of civility.'

' Are they all equally bad ?'

' Why, no, sir; some are a trifle worse. There's one or two that bother me terrible.'

' Can I help you ?'

' I wish you would, sir. Your judgment is just what I need.'

' You shall have it and welcome.'

He thanked me heartily, and drawing his chair up to the table briskly, unfolded the letter he had before him.

' Do you know Mr. Randle Bond, sir ?' he asked; ' your uncle's step-son ?'

' I have not even seen him.'

Davie took to stroking his cheek again

reflectively with the letter, and said slowly :

‘ He is not a nice young man, Mr. Falkland—not the sort of young man you would like to have for your son, nor for a friend, nor even for an acquaintance. ’Tis not his own fault, maybe, but the fault of those whose duty it was to bring him up carefully, and who neglected him and let him run wild. ’Tis his mother’s story repeated, sir. Look what neglect and ill-treatment have done for her—taken all the sweetness and tenderness out of her—withered the kernel of womanhood within her, and left only the dry hard shell. I don’t say that her son ever had the capability of becoming good and beautiful that she had. There’s something wrong in the strain of him, I believe, but I’m positive certain he’s worse than God made him. His mother had no affection for him ; she had none for any living

soul, I think, after the illness that followed her confinement. If the heart be the seat of the affections, sir, that poor woman as surely broke hers as any who has had the better fortune to die in breaking it. I can hardly think 'tis the same woman when I see her now and think of her as she was.

‘However, I’m straying away from Randle and his letter. I saw him long ago when I went to the theatre to tell Mrs. Bond of her husband’s death. I kind of lost my way amongst the painted boards and ups and downs of the stage, and seeing a group of carpenters and players, I went up to them to ask where I should find the lady. In the middle of the group I found a pasty-faced boy, dressed like a little lord, with lace ruffles and paste buckles, and a gold chain with a couple of watches at his little fob, holding a pot of porter in his hand and a

clay pipe in his mouth, which he was smoking for a wager, while the rascals around him watched his face to see whether they should win or lose.

"Do you begin to feel ill?" asked one.

"——" he replied, whereon they all laughed, at which encouragement he let off a string of vile oaths and foul words that made me sick to hear. I made my inquiry of the man who stood beside me.

"Mrs. Walsingham?" says he; "I don't know. Where's your mother, Randle?"

The boy replied with an indecency, for he had no respect even for his mother's name. She dressed him in finery to gratify her vanity, she took him to the theatre or wherever she went to suit her convenience; and the boy knew it, and reproached her before my face with her treatment. She punished him at wrong times, and when she

wished to be obeyed she bribed him. The unwholesome life stunted the growth of his body, and forced the development of all that was bad in his disposition. At the theatre he learnt all the vices of the men, and of the women, too. No wonder, then, Mr. Falkland, that he is what we find him now—an undersized, impudent, insolent, and gene'lly unpleasant young man.'

' You have seen a good deal of him lately.'

' Yes, sir ; they come very reg'lly—him and the Squire. The Squire seems to have a great deal of influence over him, and he respects the Squire prodigiously. They play cards for heavy stakes—and lose ; at any rate, they say they do ; and they come to me as bold as you please for money to pay their debts.'

' Do you let them have it ?'

' Yes, sir. I've the Squire's note of hand

for two hundred, and Mr. Bond's for three hundred and fifty. That's pretty good for six weeks, isn't it, sir ?

'Do you know that my uncle has not the means to redeem his notes ?'

'Yes. Mrs. Bond—Mrs. Walsingham—Lady Kestral—your aunt has told me that. The Squire hasn't enough to pay his rent ; nevertheless, he's taken new lodgings in Bedford Square, and furnished 'em with the best.'

'And, knowing this, you lend him money ?'

'Yes, sir,' said Davie laconically, as he continued to stroke his cheek with the letter.

'May I ask why ?'

'There's a lot of reasons, but the foundation of 'em all is, that by some means or another he's found out that I am the possessor of Mr. Bond's fortune,

which he believes ought to be in his hands.'

' You learnt this from Lady Kestral ?'

' Yes. He's using her kindly now, poor soul !'

I own I could not share Davie's sympathy for this heartless woman, and it seemed to me that he was carrying his generosity to an extravagant degree to suffer insult, robbery, and possible obloquy, in order to shield her from the just punishment of her own act.

' I shouldn't mind a few hundreds,' continued Davie thoughtfully, ' nor a few thousands, for the matter of that; but I don't see any likelihood of its ending there. It looks as if they meant to have every penny I have; and,' he added drily, ' I don't quite fancy that. There's some one else to think of besides that poor weman. And yet for the life of me——'

He broke off abruptly, throwing the letter on the table and scratching his head in perplexity. I knew that he had not told me all his difficulty.

‘What is there in the letter that troubles you?’ I asked.

‘Oh, that!’ he said carelessly, as if returning to a matter of minor importance. ‘Tis a letter from my young gentleman—look at it, sir.’

I opened the letter, which was writ in a hand to disgrace a schoolboy, and read :

‘DERE ADAMS,

‘Bein in licker last night, drew a bill upon you for 9ty 9 pounds 9teen, payble to Mr. J. Cohen at a munth, witch, as my father refuses to help me, must beg you to meat. You can keap this leter as an ack’ (a blot) ‘ment. Shall run down

and krack a bottle with you befour long,
and pay my adresses to the lovely Delia, to
whom tendrest regards. Very sory to bin
in licker, but am very sin' (a smudge) 'ly
your friend,

'RANDOLPH BOND.'

'There can be no question as to the answer you should send to that letter,' said I angrily; for his impudent familiarity in speaking of my Delia put me in a passion.

'How would you answer it, sir?' asked Davie quietly.

'Tell him that you have no wish to see him, and refuse to meet his bill.'

'It must finish somewhere; it can't go on for ever,' he replied, still in a calm tone of uncertainty.

For the first time I was angry with Davie. His generosity seemed to me nothing more than mean weakness.

'Tis a conspiracy to ruin you,' said I —
'Tis a levying of black mail, and your —
submission will only incite them to further —
outrage.'

'That's what I thought, sir,' he said, with —
provoking coolness. 'I'll write to him and —
let him know in plain words, that though I —
meet this bill, I will not let him have —
another groat till the old score's wiped off —.
So there's an end to that ; and now let's have —
a talk on some other subject that won't —
ruffle up our tempers so much, for this is —
wus than slugs on tender sprouts.'





CHAPTER XII.

DAVIE PREPARES TO ENTERTAIN NEW FRIENDS.

STILL a few days our work at Seven-oaks was finished, and I gave up my lodging there, and took possession of the room in the Hall which had been mine in my youth. We took our models with us, though the outhouse in which we were to work was not yet ready for us. My Delia's work was placed upon a stand in the Hall, where it could come to no harm, but could be seen to advantage. I was proud that it should be seen by the families who came to pay their visits to Mr. Adams

and his daughter ; for my admiration of her delicate and artistic treatment of the subject increased every time I regarded it ; and she was no less proud in showing it, for all that was excellent she attributed to me.

‘ You speak of the model as if ‘twas all my work,’ said I one day, in remonstrating against the praises she had bestowed on the composition of the figure and its expression ; ‘ you should be proud of your own achievement.’

‘ I am,’ she cried, drawing herself up to her full height and laughing.

‘ Then put your name upon the clay.’

‘ With all my heart,’ said she ; and she took up a tool that lay upon the pedestal, and wrote, in bold letters, ‘ Falkland.’

‘ ‘Tis our name, dear,’ said she ; ‘ yours and mine, as ‘tis our work.’

I expressed a wish one day that my good

friend, Mr. Rogers, should see the work, and criticise it before we began the large copy ; whereupon Davie, always hospitably inclined, suggested that I should beg him to come and spend a few days with me.

'Look you, sir,' said he, "'twill be a week at least before the carpenter and glazier have finished the skylights and tables for your use ; and you've had no answer from the folks in London who are to bring the clay down, so I wager you'll not get it before the house is ready. Why not make a little jollification ? We've had no house-warming yet ; and 'tis expected of us, be sure. There's a dozen good families have called upon us, and the most charming set of people, for aristocrats, they seem to be ; not a bit like the London folks. No sneering at this, that, or 'tother, and no sniggering behind your back. Pleasant,

and glad to be treated pleasantly. A most miserable thing it is, calling upon folks for the first time ; and you may be sure they wouldn't give themselves the pain to do so if they didn't expect to be repaid for it some way. Let's have a reg'lar good entertainment : a fine dinner, with the best of everything from London — music and Italians, and a galy in the gardens after dark, with ever so many of those little additional lamps' (Davie had visited Vauxhall, and been highly delighted with the spectacle), ' and a display of fireworks—hey ?'

We agreed to the party, but persuaded Davie to dispense with the fireworks. The day was fixed ; and Delia wrote invitations to all the county families who had called or sent their cards. I also wrote to Mr. Rogers and Drench ; and in the course of a few days Davie had the supreme satisfaction

of knowing that everyone of the invitations was accepted.

‘ We shall make a new set of friends,’ said he gleefully ; ‘ people who will take me for what I am worth, and like me none the less because my looks and speech are homely. We shall have women here, sir, as well as men ; and that’s a sure sign that I am looked upon as a respectable man. ’Twill be a pleasure to see these honest folk, and to visit them in return ; and when they find that I am a straightforward fair-dealing man, with good intentions, they’ll not think it amiss, may be, to let me keep a pack of hounds and join in coursing hares and hunting foxes, and what not, as soon as I can keep my seat in a saddle. Who knows but what I may come to be a Justice of the Peace one of these days ! Well, thank God, we have not to seek

amongst London bucks and beaux for friends !'

In the following days he was occupied wholly in preparing for the entertainment of his friends ; the subject was never out of his head for ten minutes at a time. He went to London four or five times in the six days, and became somewhat tiresome with his perpetual speculations on the tastes and predilections of the coming visitors. Drench was of great service to him, for he knew what was the weakness of everyone who suffered from indigestion for miles round, and he made no secret of it.

'I shall have my hands full after this feast, I see very clearly,' said he to me, with a cheerful smile ; 'and if I can only contrive to get Mr. Adams to let me place the guests at table before their favourite dishes, 'twill be fifty pounds in my pocket.'

Delia and I were as happy as Davie during those days, though in another way ; and it was marvellous how my temper changed as my health improved and my strength returned. I ceased to fret and worry myself with forebodings of unfortunate possibilities ; I accepted the happiness of the hour with gratitude, undiminished by one single misgiving as to the length of its duration ; and the forced idleness, which a few weeks before I should have regarded as nothing less than a calamity, was now the source of pleasure to me. I had never before experienced the delight of laziness ; but it seemed that, no matter what my condition was, it must be happy if Delia were by me. And that dear creature, it charmed me to see, shared my contentment fully, whether she ate with me in the cottage kitchen or in a noble dining-hall ; whether she worked by my side in an uncomfortable

shed, or idled with me in a garden ; whether she wore a plain russet gown, or was dressed with the richness of a princess. 'Twas indeed an earnest of our future happiness as man and wife, and a tacit promise of fidelity and love that outvalued the most passionate vows and protestations.

One day we visited the church where we had first met.

' 'Twas here,' says she, as we stood by the monument I had repaired—' here that our hands first met.'

She looked at me in silence, with sparkling eyes, as if she wished to tell me something, yet dared not.

' Well?' said I presently, in a tone of inquiry.

' I will show you something when we get home,' she said, with a laugh.

And in the evening, when we were alone, she opened a little parcel tied with a ribbon,



and showed me a glove that still bore the white print of my plaster-covered hand.

‘See, love,’ said she; ‘I saw you were my master, and I loved you from the very first.’

We had returned from a walk one morning—’twas the day before the party—and Delia had gone up to her room to change her dress, when Davie came to me with trouble in his face, and, taking my arm, led me out on to the terrace.

‘I’ve had an unwelcome visitor while you have been away,’ said he. ‘Mr. Cohen has been here.’

‘Mr. Cohen?’ said I, not remembering the name at the moment.

‘The gentleman mentioned in Randle Bond’s letter, as I showed you ’tother night.’

‘Ah, I recollect.’

‘That young man has been in liquor again

seemingly, for he has drawn a second bill upon me, despite that I told him I would not meet another.'

'Tis audacious.'

'Yes,' said he; "'tis of a piece with his insolence, to which I attribute the act rather than to drunkenness. He wishes to make me understand that he is my master, and that he shall draw what bills he pleases. He has not even thought fit to excuse the act. I have had no letter from him.'

'For what amount is this bill?'

'A hundred and fifty pounds.'

'Tis the result of your promising to meet the other.'

'Yes. I half expected it. But I wished to put my doubt to the test.'

'You will not pay this bill?'

'No, sir; I thought over it well before I gave Mr. Cohen my answer; and then I

told him that I would meet the first bill, but none other.'

' You did right. I hope you will be firm in this resolution.'

' I intend to be, sir. When I think 'tis right to do a thing, I am not easily moved from my purpose. This Mr. Cohen hinted that the bill was not payable for a month, and that, perhaps, if he called again, I might alter my mind. But I bade him deceive himself by no such hope, and told him that the lodge-keeper would have orders not to admit him if he called.'

' Well done,' said I. ' Depend upon it, this graceless cub will alter his tune, finding you are not to be played with. With the first bill yet unpaid, 'twill behove him to be civil. He will write a letter of apology, and there will be an end of it.'

' I wish there may,' said Davie, with no alteration of his lugubrious tone.

'Twas evening before he recovered his spirits ; but then he cast off the recollection of this visit, and threw himself heart and soul into the work of preparing for the morrow's entertainment.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE COMING OF UNINVITED VISITORS TO ADAMS'S HALL.

M R. ROGERS had promised to leave London by the coach that arrives at Maidstone at ten o'clock, and a chariot was to be sent to meet him there. I intended to go in the carriage, but as the morning was particularly fair, and as Delia was occupied in some household duty, I started half an hour earlier on foot in preference. I had stepped over a league of the distance, when I was stopped by a voice calling my name from the window of a



hack-fly which had just passed me. Turning about, I perceived that the coach was drawing up, and that the person who called was none other than my aunt, Lady Kestral.

She was alone.

‘Oh, my dear George!’ she cried, with a prodigious show of pleasure, ‘I *am* so glad to see you—you can’t tell. Ah! you have hurt your right arm—oh! I am so sorry; I hope ’tis nothing painful. I have thought of you so often; indeed, I have dreamed of you more than once—for you have a figure which is not easily forgot—and you are just the very one of all the people in the world I most wished to see. Do, do step in and talk to me for a little five minutes—’tis a pleasure I would not lose for all the universe.’

As the coach was going in the direction of the Hall, and I was anxious to know if my aunt’s journey in any way concerned

the welfare of my friends, I accepted the invitation, after a moment's reflection, in which I saw that I could still get to Maidstone in time to meet Mr. Rogers, by taking the chariot, which we should presently encounter.

'How do I look, dear?' asked my aunt, turning her face to me for inspection, as soon as I had taken the seat beside her and the coach was in motion. 'I believe I must look frightful, for I have been up since half-past four—dragged from my bed in the middle of the night, as it were, and am nearly shaken to bits by the horrid journey.'

'Don't my eyes look sunk?'

Her face looked very pretty, but I did not tell her so, though possibly she looked for compliments.

'You have a very good complexion,' I said.

'Well, 'tis all natural. You may prove

it if you like, George,' said she, with an arch leer.

'I would not do you the injustice to doubt your word,' said I.

'You are very complimentary,' said she, making the best of my coldness, 'and prodigious handsome. I protest I should fall in love with you, were I not your aunt.' Her foot, as though by accident, touched mine as she spoke.

I made some reply as I withdrew my foot, to the purpose, or otherwise, I know not, for I was wondering whither this flirtation was leading, and comparing these tricks with the innocent love of my Delia.

'I didn't remark you were so handsome when we met before,' said she ; 'but that is scarce to be wondered at, for I was so upset by my fear of that horrid old man, my husband, discovering my secret, and of you by mischance revealing it to him, that I

could think of nothing pleasant ; and yet I must have seen in your face then the indications of an amiable and honourable disposition, to have entrusted you as I did with the secret of my life.'

'Twould have been more dangerous to your own welfare to have told me nothing,' said I.

' You mean that having learnt the secret from my lips, you feel bound in honour to screen it from discovery ?'

This was not at all what I meant, but the fact was undeniable. I said something to that effect, whereupon, taking my hand, she said :

' Oh, George ! if you knew what a desolate unhappy woman I am, how I yearn for love and sympathy, you would not—could not be so cold towards me ; and the support you must give me from a sense of honour, you would offer me from a feeling

of pity. Surely no one has added to my misfortunes by speaking against me to you.

'I understand your hint,' said I, snatching my hand from hers, for her selfish ingratitude incensed me beyond measure.

'You wish to know if Davie has revealed anything which you may for your own purpose have omitted to tell me. I will put your mind at rest by assuring you that he is as faithful to you as you have been false to him, and as incapable of doing you an injury as though you were still the penitent young girl striving to do right.'

As some people laugh to conceal their tears, so my aunt wept, or pretended to weep, to conceal the satisfaction she must have felt at this assurance of Davie's fidelity.

'I am a wicked ungrateful wretch,' she cried between her sobs—very distinctly—'to doubt the only friend I ever had. 'Tis

no excuse that the treachery of the world has made me doubt the existence of purity and honesty. Scold me, George, punish me as you will—I do not deserve to have a friend—disclose my secret and let me suffer the vindictive fury of your uncle.'

' You know well that I shall do no such thing.'

' You will be tempted to do so if your regard for Davie is as great as I believe it to be.'

' What do you mean?'

Lady Kestral overcame her emotion by a small effort, for it was inconvenient to sustain a protracted conversation and the simulation of distress together, and having wiped her eyes, heaved a shivering sigh, and replaced her handkerchief in her pocket, she said :

' Do you know what has happened since you left London?'

‘ You had better tell me.’

‘ Lord Kestral has found out Davie’s identity. I believe he made the discovery on that first night at Park Lane, and discerned that you helped me to deceive him. From what you know of him you will imagine, perhaps, that after this discovery his treatment of me was more brutal than before. I expected he would strike me—or take some mean revenge upon me. He did nothing of the sort. He never mentioned his suspicions, and from that day to this he has treated me with civility, and in such a manner as a man should treat his wife. As you see, I have decent clothes to my back—I have also a few trinkets. He has taken decent lodgings, and provided me with a maid and pin-money, and introduced one or two friends to me. When he goes out he takes me with him ; at home he is ceremoniously civil, and insists upon my

son Randle treating me with respect and deferring to my wishes.'

'In a word,' said I, 'he has made you feel the benefit of acting in concert with him.'

'Yes, if you must put it in an unpleasant way.'

'And you have acted in concert with Lord Kestral.'

'I don't understand you, George,' she said, with some embarrassment.

'You have taken care to show Davie that your present and future well-being depends upon his yielding to the extortions of your husband and son.'

My aunt called God to witness that she had no such thought in her mind.

'But sure,' added she; 'was it so, I see no reason why you should speak to me, nephew, as if 'twas a crime. 'Tis to Davie's advantage that things should go on amicably

—and to Miss Delia's also,' she concluded, with a significant smirk.

' And your amiable mission at the present moment is to show Mr. Adams the advantage of taking up the bill your son has had the audacity to draw upon him,' said I.

' I know nothing of any such matter,' she replied tartly. ' I only know that our horse cast a shoe, and that his lordship, rather than suffer me to put up with the inconvenience of staying in a village ale-house, procured this coach and sent me forward to seek **Mr. Adams's hospitality**. I do not deny that my mind was occupied with the thought of my dear friend's welfare, and seeing you, I thought to obtain your assistance to that end. Miss Adams' welfare is bound up in that of her father, and I am very interested in the fact that I chose an

unimportant about your
YOUR WANTS
time; however, in
the struggle between the
driver and the
recover what you can.

This small step, at least, will help. Your
tact has been good, but
my impression is that
though it is a good
movement, it is

'I do not
ask you
for me to help you
in your own
the condition
of happiness.'

'I shall
you
me how I
do.'

'By doing
me at first'

—and to Miss Delia's also,' she concluded, with a significant smirk.

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unfortunate moment, and have made you lose your walk and your temper at the same time ; however,' said she, giving a tug at the string that communicated with the driver, ' I hope 'tis not too late for you to recover what you have lost.'

This small sarcasm touched me not in the least, but I was concerned lest my want of tact had lost me the opportunity of helping my friend. I was silent a moment, and though the coach had stopped, I made no movement to open the door.

' I do not see,' said I, ' how it is possible for me to help Davie : the remedy lies entirely in your own hands. You alone can alter the conditions which threaten his peace and happiness.'

' I shall be extremely overjoyed if you tell me how I can do that.'

' By doing at once what you should have done at first—by telling your husband that

you have seen the will which bequeathed Mr. Bond's fortune to his servant.'

She looked at me in utter astonishment for a moment.

'Are you serious?' she asked.

'Perfectly.'

She laughed outright.

'Do you suppose,' she asked, 'that my own happiness and welfare is less dear to me than it is to Davie? or that the sense of honour which prevents you from revealing this fact to your uncle is of more importance to you than the realization of those plans which I have been for years patiently maturing is to me? I am afraid you have lost something else than your walk and your temper this morning.'

'Self is not to be considered when a duty is to be performed.'

'A prodigious fine sentiment, upon my honour! But don't you think, nephew, that

as to self, we are pretty much of a piece? 'Tis very natural you should consider my happiness as less important than Miss Delia's dowry, but you might take a little care to conceal the fact.'

I think I made a very poor retort, for I was neither inclined to repartee, nor prepared to meet a charge so unexpected and absurd.

My aunt was such an artful woman, and so good an actress, than I am inclined to believe her quarrel with me on this occasion was not the mere outcome of vexation, though doubtless it gave her some gratification to express the resentment she naturally felt in having her amiable overtures rebuffed. I can rather believe that, seeing the bent of my inclinations and the unfavourable state of my feelings towards her, she designed her taunts to pique my self-esteem and provoke me to keep her secret, as a proof that I was guiltless of

those mercenary motives she had imputed to me.

We parted with a very formal salute, and I turned again towards Maidstone, while she continued her journey to the Hall. The chariot which was to carry my friend and me back to Maplehurst overtaking me, I jumped in, and so arrived at Maidstone ten minutes before the arrival of the London coach.

I saw no gentleman's equipage before any of the alehouses on the road, but I caught sight of my uncle, and a young man whom I guessed to be Mr. Bond, lounging idly in the balcony of the Royal, in the High Street of Maidstone, which convinced me that my aunt's excuse was a falsehood, and that she was purposely sent in advance to prepare Davie for the interview with her husband or her son which was to follow.



CHAPTER XIV.

DAVIE BRINGS LORD KESTRAL TO REASON.

DAVIE met me and Mr. Rogers at the door of the Hall when we arrived. After the customary civilities were exchanged, Mr. Rogers was conducted to the chamber set apart for him to change his travelling-dress, and Davie and I were left alone.

‘Where is Delia?’ I asked—’twas usually my first question when I had been separated from her.

‘There,’ said Davie. He was standing by the window in sombre thought, and as

he spoke he took his hand from his chin, and pointed with his thumb to the bottom of the lawn, where I perceived Lady Kestral altering the shape of my sweetheart's hat, and Delia leaning on the balustrade, regarding the manipulation listlessly. 'We have unexpected guests to-day, sir,' he added, in a tone of dejection.

'Unwelcome as unexpected!' said I.

'I don't think I may say your aunt is unwelcome, sir. If I am not glad to see her, 'tis only because I feel for the misfortunes of that unhappy woman.'

I was silent. It was not for me to tell him that his sympathy was misplaced and undeserved.

'Look you, sir,' he continued, 'is she not more to be commiserated than the blind old man you figured there, as an object for love and pity? He has lost but one sense, and the rest are sharpened to catch what is beau-

tiful and find delight in it; but that poor woman there has lost all susceptibility, and can find nothing in all the world to give her happiness. The birds might all be dead, the whole earth withered, and the sun a blot in the skies—'twould make no difference to her. There's not a soul whose loss she'd mourn. Her highest hope is to gratify some mean ambition, to obtain a place of rank which may make her envied. Is it the colour of the ribbon or the form of the hat that gives her pleasure?—not a bit; 'tis because the ruling fashion is for this or that. She walked in the garden because Delia proposed it; she would have preferred to spend the time in Delia's wardrobe. She cares to talk of nothing else but fashions and intrigues—even to Delia. What should you say, sir, if Delia had no better pleasure?’

‘God forbid that she should find pleasure in such matters,’ I cried, vexed—immoder-



ately, doubtless—to think her chaste ear should receive such scandals as Lady Kestral could tell. ‘Delia has nothing in common with that woman.’

‘And yet——’ Davie checked himself, and shrugging his shoulders said: ‘I have told you the story of that woman’s life, sir, more than once already.’

‘You know that Lord Kestral and Mr. Bond are coming,’ I said, after a pause which he seemed disinclined to break.

‘Yes,’ he replied, his voice and manner changing at once from pity to anger. ‘I must have it out with them the moment they arrive. If they stay in this house it shall be as my guests, not as my masters. They shall be civil to my friends, and treat me with respect. I don’t think I shall lack courage or firmness either, for I’ve thought out what ’tis fit to do; but I will have you in the room at the time, sir, if you have no

objection, that they may see I have no intention to make a secret of the matter. It would suit them to keep up this pretence of ignorance, but,' he added, with an air of full determination, 'it don't suit me. They shan't upset my plans; no, sir, they shan't even spoil this day's happiness !'

We had not long to wait for the interview. In half an hour a carriage arrived at the door, and Lord Kestral and Mr. Bond stepped out.

I had now an opportunity of seeing Mr. Bond closely, and I found that Delia, in describing him as 'an odious little person,' had in a few words said all that a more minute description would convey. He was short, fat, and flabby, with a head disproportionately large. He had a short turned-up nose, a pendulous under-lip, a cadaverous complexion, shifty, cowardly little eyes that never looked one full in the face, except in

a bullying, defiant manner, as if he was conscious of his own weakness, and felt it necessary to assert the contrary. He walked with a little mincing gait ; his hand shook, possibly from the effect of recent libations, and he spoke with a squeaky high voice, which he seemed incapable to modulate in equable accent—'twas the voice of a small puppy which must either whine or snarl.

Davie, with instinctive hospitality, held out his hand to his visitors, and received the two fingers of my uncle, and then the two fingers of Mr. Bond—for this young man watched his stepfather, and, as nearly as he could, imitated his grand airs. When Lord Kestral, having examined me through his glasses, made me a very slight inclination of his head, Mr. Bond did the same. I could have laughed at the impudent little mannikin.

‘ You have been laying out money here,

as elsewhere, Mr. Adams,' said Lord Kestral in a tone of reproof, as he paused upon the steps to look through his eyeglass across the lawn. 'Marble is expensive.'

'Damnably expensive,' snarled Mr. Bond.

'Yes,' said Davie coldly; 'I have laid out money here, though not so much by ten or twelve thousand pounds as I intended. We must see what we can do with that bottom meadow, Mr. Falkland: if you don't think it out of place, I'll let the man make a lake there, as he proposed.'

My uncle's face did not lose its smile, but I saw his fingers twitch as though he were making a clutch at the escaping treasure.

'You part with your money very readily, Mr. Adams,' he said drily.

'When it suits me, Squire,' answered Davie sententiously.

'Indeed! Ha!' Lord Kestral dropped

his glass, paused a moment, and then, in dry, measured tones, said: ‘I wish to have a few words with you, Mr. Adams.’

‘With all my heart,’ Davie said, leading the way into the house.

‘Lady Kestral is here, I presume?’

‘Yes; she is in the room yonder. Do you wish her to join us?’

‘No. Mr. Bond, you can leave us, if you wish.’

Mr. Bond took the hint, made an awkward bow, and minced off to the drawing-room.

‘We will go in the library, Squire,’ said Davie. ‘Mr. Falkland, will you come with us?’

‘What I have to say is of a private nature,’ said Lord Kestral, stopping short at the door, which Davie had opened.

‘I have no secrets from Mr. Falkland,’ said Davie; ‘he is my friend.’

‘Very probably,’ said his lordship, with a little cough. ‘As, however, I have no intention to make him my confidant, I must decline to speak in his presence.’

‘Very good,’ said Davie. ‘When he is not present you can say what you have to say. And so, as that matter’s disposed of for the present, we shall be able to tackle another affair upon which I have a few words to say to you, Squire. Will you have the goodness to walk in?’

His lordship reflected a moment. Then he walked in as he was invited. ’Twas the best thing he could do, the only alternative being to withdraw from the house and take his family with him.

‘Now, Squire,’ said Davie, as soon as the door was shut, ‘in the first place, I want to know about this bill that Master Randle drew upon me.’

‘What about it?’ asked my uncle, taken

aback by the suddenness of the attack and the determined manner of Davie, who had drawn up a chair and planted himself directly in front of him.

'All about it,' replied Davie, smacking his thigh.

'I shall be glad if you will be a little less violent and a little more definite.'

'To begin at the beginning then, Master Jackanapes drew a bill upon me, a short time since, for ninety pounds odd, and apologized for the act as well as he could, I believe—and that was not very well. He said he was in liquor at the time. Allowing that this proceeding arose from a failing rather than from intention, I forgave the offence and promised to meet the bill; but I warned him at the time that I would pay to no other order of his, and warned him not to repeat the performance.'

'I know nothing of this.'

‘Would you like to see his letter?’

‘No. I have no wish to interfere in the matter.’

‘Very likely not,’ said Davie, with a short hard laugh. ‘However, you understand the position of things.’

Lord Kestral made a stiff bow, and took out his snuff-box.

‘Very well. Yesterday morning comes a gentleman Jew, Mr. Cohen, to ask me if I shall be prepared, the end of a month, to pay a bill signed by Mr. Randle Bond for two hundred and fifty pounds. I told him I certainly would not pay that nor any other order of the same signature, and so sent him about his business. Now, Squire, I must tell you, in case you know no more about this affair than about the first, that Mr. Randle has offered no sort of excuse or explanation of this action, which was done in direct opposition to the warning I gave him.

If he was in liquor when he wrote that order, and has been in liquor ever since, I pity him, and will forgive him, if he asks my pardon ; if not, you must take the best means of getting him out of this house without delay, for I assure you he shall not stay in it, if his audacity is not explained and atoned for by the best apology he can make.'

My uncle was fairly bewildered by Davie's exhibition of strength. The pinch of snuff he had taken from the box he kept applying first to one nostril and then to the other, all the time Davie spoke, ignoring the fact that his open snuff-box tilted at an angle, and, shaking with his hand, was dribbling the precious dust over his velvet breeches.

'I—I fail to see, Mr. Adams—I fail to see why you address me on the subject of your grievance,' he said, after finishing the pinch of snuff in reflective silence.

' You know nothing more of this last

bill than of the first?' said Davie interrogatively.

'I know something about the bill, certainly. Mr. Cohen told me of it yesterday evening.

'On leaving me yesterday he said he should apply to you at once. Your visit, following so quickly, led me to hope that your object was to explain the matter and make things pleasant. With that hope I gave you my hand and asked you into my house. You seem to be in perfect accord with Mr. Bond, and must know his intention in coming here. If he has not come to apologize, or you have not come to apologize for him, I have as much cause for complaint in your conduct as in his.'

Lord Kestral rose to his feet as if he intended to express his indignation in having his conduct questioned by Davie ; then he sat down again, as if second consideration showed him the impolicy of ending the in-

terview in that way. He shrugged his shoulders, and with a careless flourish of his hands which sent the last grain of snuff out of his box, he exclaimed :

‘Pish! After all, why should I take offence? You’re in the right. If Randle has offended, he must apologize. ’Twas a more important matter that brought me here, and I protest I am entirely ignorant of his intentions.’

‘In that case, Squire,’ said Davie, rising from his seat, ‘I’ll send for the young man at once, and we will put the question to him point-blank.’

He crossed to the fireplace, and laid his hand upon the bell-pull.

‘One moment,’ cried Lord Kestral, in haste. ‘Don’t ring the bell, Adams. Mr. Bond, you know, is a young man of very undisciplined habits. He may have some idea that circumstances justify his act.’

'He had better be undeceived at once, then,' said Davie, still holding the bell-pull.

'Don't be hasty, Mr. Adams. 'Tis hardly fair to provoke a person of irritable disposition to an angry outburst which he would possibly repent when his temper grew cool.'

'Why, that's true, Squire,' cried Davie. "'Tis the best thing I've ever heard you say.'

'There is no need of anger. Let us proceed in a diplomatic, reasonable spirit.'

'By all means. I hope, Mr. Falkland, you'll just give me a word if you find me getting unreasonable. I know this young buck isn't overburdened with patience, and one mustn't expect too much of him all of a sudden. Come, how are we to make him understand that he has gone wrong, and must eat humble pie?'

'I will talk to him in the course of the day. I undertake to do that, and to make

him offer an apology.' My uncle leaned back, evidently much relieved by this turn of affairs, and wiped away the drops that had gathered in his eyes, as he continued, 'It shall be arranged in an orderly, gentlemanly way—no noise, no violence, you understand. Persuasion, conciliation and concession—these are the means by which a diplomatic triumph is secured.'

'I've no objection,' said Davie. 'You may secure as much diplomatic triumph as you please, so that the young cub is brought to behave himself decently.'

My uncle waved his hands in a reassuring manner, and gave himself up to silent thought for a few moments. He looked so satisfied and contented at that moment, that I believe his thoughts had wandered from the present situation entirely. Perhaps he was indulging in speculations of the greatness he should have attained to had he

obtained a place in the Government instead of losing his seat in the House of Commons.

‘I think you had better speak to Master Bond as soon as possible,’ Davie said, seating himself as if there was still something he wished to have out.

‘All in good time, all in good time,’ said Lord Kestral.

‘Just so, and I take it there’s no time so good as the present. For you see, Squire, I have friends coming to dinner—friends very much after my own heart—and I wish it to be understood quite clearly that whoever offends them will offend me. They are to be treated with respect. Master Randle may laugh at me behind my back as much as he chooses, but if I catch him laughing at any of my friends—out he goes by the garden gate.’

My uncle glanced from Davie to me and

back to him, seeming also to have more to say than circumstances permitted.

‘I will take the first opportunity I have, and do my best to achieve a very difficult task,’ he said. ‘For Mr. Bond is irritable, and finds it difficult at times to govern his temper, especially when he believes that he has a right to act as he pleases.’

‘Now we are coming to the point,’ said Davie. ‘You shall tell me if you please, Squire, what right this young fellow thinks he has to draw bills upon me.’

‘It is that which I may explain to you when we are in private.’

‘There is no need to play at cross questions and crooked answers. Master Randle believes he has a right to my money. Is that what you mean?’

‘That is a matter for future discussion,’ replied my uncle, with deliberation.

Davie turned upon his chair, smacked his

thigh, and tossed his head in vexation at the impossibility of getting a straightforward answer from Lord Kestral.

‘ ‘Twas as bad as digging for turnips when the ground’s froze,’ he said to me afterwards ; ‘ when you get ’em, they’re not worth having.’

My uncle, on the other hand, seemed vastly pleased with the effect of his circumlocution. He crossed his meagre shank over his knee, held his head on one side, looked at Davie with a ridiculous air of pity, and swung one arm over the back of his chair, while with the other hand he played carelessly with the dangling trinkets at his fob.

‘ The shortest way,’ said I, ‘ will be for me to leave the room.’

‘ No, Mr. Falkland; I beg you to stay,’ said Davie, interrupting me. ‘ I want everything to be open and straightforward. Look you, Squire’—he faced my uncle again—

‘there is no necessity to beat about the bush. You know, and Mr. Falkland here knows, that I am that Davie who was gardener to Mr. Bond, of Southgate, and that it is his money that I am spending. Now, tell me, with a simple “Yes” or “No,” if it is the knowledge of this fact which makes Master Randle believe that he is justified in demanding money from me.’

‘You admit that your money belonged to Mr. Bond, of Southgate?’ Lord Kestral exclaimed.

‘Certainly I do; and here is Mr. Falkland to witness the confession.’

‘Then I agree with you there is no longer any necessity for reserve. It was the suspicion of this fact that made Mr. Bond feel justified in demanding money from you.’

‘Ah! that is something. And it is this consideration which has also made you anxious about my expenses, eh, Squire?’

Davie asked with a laugh. ‘So concerned lest I should invest my money in profitless adventures, or bestow it upon unworthy persons—this is why you exposed the men who borrowed money from me upon bad security, and cautioned me against fraudulent acquaintances, and discovered that the horses I wanted to buy were spavined, and found that the marble on my lawn was expensive?’

‘It is natural I should be concerned on behalf of my wife’s son,’ said my uncle, with some embarrassment, for Davie’s manner showed no sign of culpability.

‘So it is, and honourable, too,’ cried Davie, with good-humour. ‘I begin to like you, Squire. You have paid me this visit on his behalf, perhaps.’

‘Yes; and on yours.’

‘Why, this is more than I have any right to expect of you, since I take it you look upon me as a thief.’

‘I should be sorry to call you by so hard a name, Mr. Adams, for I believe that your intentions have been good, however much your conduct may have been in fault.’

‘Thank you, Squire; I think I may take credit for meaning well. I see you wish to make matters pleasant all round.’

‘I wish to avoid a public scandal, to obviate exposure, to arrange the affair in an amicable manner, to compromise matters in such a manner that all parties shall be satisfied. This is why I came, for, as I admit, Mr. Bond is hasty, and at times violent, and left to his own devices might, in a moment of desperation, do you irremediable mischief, without in any degree improving his own condition. You have already seen a proof of his violent and ungovernable disposition. You told him you would not meet his bill, and he immediately drew one for double the amount of the first.’

Davie sat in thought for a minute ; then he asked gravely :

‘ And what do you think he would do if you did not succeed in arranging matters with me ? ’

‘ He might find a lawyer to take up his case and institute criminal proceedings against you. I don’t say that he would gain his cause. You have money to pay for better lawyers than ever he could command, and even with the admission you have made before Mr. Falkland this morning, I doubt if sufficient evidence could be found to convict you, if you chose to plead “ Not guilty.” But you would lose every friend you have, and could never dare to take your daughter into creditable society, for fear of being treated with aversion and contempt ; for, whatever may be the legal aspect of the case, you would be morally guilty in the eyes of



all honest people who could reason for themselves.'

Davie, with his hands clasped and his arms resting on his knees, had been listening with his eyes on the ground. He now lifted them to me, and nodded assent gloomily.

'That is supposing you do not prove that you have a legal right to the money,' I said in a low tone to Davie.

Davie shook his head. My uncle lent his ear to catch my words : he probably failed to hear what I said ; but he could see that Davie declined the suggestion.

'There is another course which a young man of Mr. Bond's violent, and I may say vindictive temperament, might, and I think would pursue. He could follow you wherever you went in society, tell his own story, and spread damaging reports of your character.'

‘Ah, I think I could cure him of that,’ Davie said sententiously. ‘Well,’ he added, drawing himself up, ‘what arrangement do you propose?’

‘Some restitution must be made. You can never pay back the full amount of Mr. Bond’s fortune, nor do I suggest that you should give all you have.’ Davie bowed his acknowledgment. ‘But you must do all that is reasonable and just.’

‘I am quite ready to do that.’

‘Good!’ exclaimed Lord Kestral gaily. ‘Now, Mr. Adams, since you object to paying in an irregular indiscriminate fashion, I have hit upon a means which will be more direct, and may meet the necessities of the case to the satisfaction of all parties. I presume that this extravagant mode of living is not to your taste—that you would be far more content to live in a humbler

style, at the expense, say, of two or three hundred a year.'

'Very likely.'

'I presume also, that you have taken this unsuitable position in society, and been lavish with your money, to gratify the inclinations and tastes of your daughter.'

'You're about right, Squire.'

'You may also have had another object in view—that of providing a suitable husband for your daughter.'

'Right again.'

'Now, the means I propose will maintain your daughter in the condition of life she prefers, and allow her still to indulge her expensive tastes, and at the same time provide her with a husband of a good position and connection, and at the same time satisfy the demands of Mr. Bond, supposing that you will consent to accept a comparatively humble competency.'

‘I wish for nothing better ; and now, Squire, let me know how all these good results are to be obtained.’

‘By your giving your daughter in marriage to Mr. Bond, and making her a dowry of——’

He got no farther, for Davie, after a moment’s astonishment at this proposal, burst into a loud laugh, that took away his lordship’s breath with surprise.

‘I do not understand your merriment,’ said he, as Davie’s hilarity subsided.

‘Do you know, my lord,’ said I, ‘that Miss Adams is betrothed to me ?’

‘I heard something of the matter,’ replied he ; ‘and let me tell you that I have not overlooked your credit in this scheme. Despite your revolutionary principles, sir, I opine you have yet sufficient regard for the honour of your family to avoid an alliance with the daughter of a—of a——’



‘I am not a thief, Squire,’ said Davie quietly but firmly. ‘Mr. Bond has no more claim to my money than—than you have.’

‘In the absence of a will, the late Mr. Bond’s fortune should be in the hands of his heir-at-law,’ said Lord Kestral, with an assumption of ease which did not conceal the inquietude he felt.

‘Master Randle has all that is due to him, and more.’

‘But the money?’

‘That was given to me unconditionally by my master before his death.’

‘Can you prove that?’

‘I can prove it, if it is necessary. And now, Squire, listen to me. It is in Mr. Bond’s power, as you have shown, to make me very unhappy, and to cause a great deal of trouble to very innocent people. It is in your power, or in the power of any un-

principled and ill-disposed person, to do mischief to me. I admit that I do not want my affairs to be dragged before the public, and I do not want to be perpetually at war with evil-doers and slanderers. You have influence over Mr. Bond; he will listen to your advice, when mine might only lead him to some act of senseless revenge. I think he may be guided by a sense of self-interest, where reason and good-feeling would fail to lead him. I wish him to understand that I lent him money, not from fear, and that I ceased to lend him money because I found it only rendered him insolent. Let him know that while he behaves decently I will treat him like a gentleman, and that, for his mother's sake, I will assist him in any enterprise by which he may live in independence, if I find that the enterprise is genuine, and

his wish to do well sincere. Let him understand, also, that if he forces me to produce the will, he will have to give up possession of the property at Southgate, which that will makes mine. Further, Squire, assure him that I am not so careless in money matters as one might think, and that I hold his papers, as I hold yours, for every farthing I have lent, and that should he annoy me in any way, I shall put all those papers under a cover, and send them as a present to the gentleman Jew, Mr. Cohen.'

'Not mine, Mr. Adams!' cried his lordship, in undisguised alarm.

'Yes, Squire, yours also; for you tell me you have influence over this young man, and if he offends I shall take it you have failed in your friendly duty to me.'

'Good God! I have been hoodwinked

—deceived. You—you—you never hinted at the possession of a will.'

' You have taken the utmost pains to prevent my telling you.'

' Lady Kestral told me nothing about it —she must have known it.' Lord Kestral dashed the rheum from his eyes, and turned them, with a baleful look, towards the window, through which, at that moment, his wife's laughter came.

' Possibly she thought it was destroyed. One word more, Squire. I am anxious that Lady Kestral should hold a good position in society—the position you have lately given her. If your means are not sufficient to meet all the expenses, you know I shall be glad to help you. We can arrange for the payment of a certain sum every quarter.'

' Mr. Adams, I have wronged you,' said Lord Kestral, holding out his hand.

'I'm glad to hear you say so, Squire.
'Tis as good as a promise not to do it
again.'

He showed such good-temper that Lord Kestral seemed to think he might get some further advantage.

'About that bill, Mr. Adams,' he said, taking him by the arm and speaking in his blandest tones, as they went towards the door. 'If Mr. Bond apologizes, I suppose you will forgive all, in your generous wide spirit—hum? You'll pay Cohen, eh?'

'No, Squire; not a farthing. The only thing I shall ever give Mr. Cohen will be that packet of promises-to-pay in the event of Mr. Bond's not behaving properly.'

'I'll talk to him without a moment's delay,' said my uncle; 'I'll talk to him at once,'—and then his jaw fell between his fingers and thumb, as he looked askance at

the floor ; for he was, perhaps, realizing that a more difficult task lay before him than he had yet undertaken, and that diplomacy is not always an easy science.

END OF VOL. II.

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